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HEARTH GHOSTS.



VOL. II.



# HEARTH GHOSTS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“GILBERT RUGGE,” “A DANGEROUS GUEST,”

ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. II.

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# HEARTH GHOSTS.



NARRATIVE I.—*continued.*

A MARKET MUDLING MAGNATE.

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# HEARTH GHOSTS.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### IN THE NIGHT.

WITH that nice regard to conventional propriety that distinguished him, Mr. Ibbotson always made a point of putting an early termination to his Sunday dinner-parties; and this, not from any niggardly consideration for his own port and sherry, but purely out of deference to the sacred character of the day. Consequently, when Frank entered the dining-room after his return from church, he found his father alone in that stately apartment, with the remains of the banquet and half a dozen empty decanters before him.

“Bring Master Frank’s supper in here,” said Mr. Ibbotson to the servant. But Frank did not seem disposed for supper, and, eschewing any more substantial refreshment than a maccaroon, took his seat on a stool by the fireside.

“Papa,” began the lad, looking up at his father, who sat opposite, “what did Mr. Moggs mean by calling you ‘your worship,’ at dessert, to-night, and then everybody laughing in that way?”

“Mean—my boy? Why, that your father will be Mayor of this town afore to-morrow at this time,” replied Mr. Ibbotson, and his face relaxed into a smile of satisfaction as he spoke.

“Oh!” replied Frank, quietly, looking steadily at his father, “when I am a man, shall I be a Mayor too?” Frank was thinking of the office in connection with its powers over gravediggers, &c.

“ You’ll stand a pretty good chance,” replied his father, “ but you’ll have other fish to fry, I guess—or should have.” The honours Mr. Ibbotson coveted for his son were somewhat loftier, be it said, than the local dignity he himself aspired to. Not that the wealthy tanner thought lightly of the distinction about to be conferred on him on the morrow. For months past had he worked and struggled,—ay, schemed and truckled—to obtain it, even to the defilement of the small remnant of honour he possessed.

“ We shall have fine doings to-morrow, Frank,” continued the prosperous man. “ A dinner at the Town Hall and bonfires at night; and you’ll hear the folks cheer and the band play, when I enter the Hall, and see a fine procession, I dare say.”

“ Ah, that will be like Dick Whittington in the story-book—eh, papa?”

“ Ah! ah! your father is a sort of second

Whittington, I expect," replied Mr. Ibbotson, with a chuckle. "He's carried his bundle and slept on the king's highway in his time, though he ain't got that wonderful cat."

"Do you know, papa, Miss Cringe says it wasn't a cat at all that made Dick's fortune, but only a ship of that name? But I won't believe it, because—because——" Frank hesitated and looked thoughtful; it was not so easy to give a reason for his faith in Dick's feline friend.

"Cat or no cat, Whittington made a slapping fortune by all accounts; and your father hasn't done much amiss in that line, my boy, considering that Market Mudling isn't what London is, for money-making. When you go to school, Frank, mind you let the lads know, if they give themselves airs to you, that you've got a father as could buy up half a dozen of your needy gentlefolks."

“Ought people to buy up needy gentlefolks, papa?” Frank regarded his father enquiringly.

Mr. Ibbotson expressed no direct opinion on the point, but with a chuckle replied: “There’s plenty of needy gentlefolks, my boy, that are glad to be bought up. They’ve all got their price—rich or poor, gentle or simple. Show ’em a well-filled purse, and—be they boys, or be they men—they won’t say much harm of you. This is what equalizes us all in these days.” Mr. Ibbotson took a sovereign from his pocket, and stuck it facetiously in his eye. “Look at folks with a pair of gold eyeglasses, Frank, and depend upon it they’ll think you good-looking. Ah, ah, that’s queer, isn’t it?”

Frank made no reply: he was gazing up at a picture on the wall opposite. “And it came to pass, when the beggar died,

he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." Frank knew the words on the margin of the frame so well that he read them mechanically. "The rich man was not there," pondered the boy. "I don't understand it;" and he talked but little afterwards.

"Come, my lad, you are getting sleepy," said his father, noticing his silence. "It's time you were in bed."

The bright hue which had dyed Frank's cheeks all the evening had faded away: he looked pale and tired. He rose from his seat, silently, as his father spoke, and going up to him, kissed him affectionately and turned away to leave the room. He had reached the door and opened it, when he suddenly turned back, and in a hurried voice, said, "A light, papa, a light! The hall lamp's out;" and he looked around him like one who finds himself in sudden darkness.

Mr. Ibbotson went to the door. The lamp was shining brightly as usual, and the hall perfectly light.

“Why, you’re asleep, my boy. It’s as light as day here.”

Frank was looking about him in a dreamy, bewildered way.

“It’s high time you were in bed,” continued Mr. Ibbotson, with a smile. “You’re dreaming already;” and with the old joke about the dustman, Mr. Ibbotson took hold of his son’s hand and led him to the staircase. There he parted with him, and standing at the foot, watched the boy slowly ascend the great flight of stairs, until a servant appeared in sight.

When Mr. Ibbotson returned to the dining-room, he proceeded, according to his usual custom, to mix himself a glass of grog.

Drawing his chair nearer the fire, Mr.

Ibbotson placed his feet on the fender, with the air of a man willing to surrender himself to a little thought. After stroking his knees complacently, and taking a few sips of the liquid, he folded his hands across his capacious waistcoat, and leaned back in his chair with a meditative air. Presently, a smile hovered about the corners of his mouth. Ere long, the smile expanded, and a low laugh escaped his lips—a laugh that expressed immeasurable content, but with nothing genial nor gladsome about it. What was it that caused Mr. Ibbotson to indulge in this solitary mirth? What were the pleasant fancies that filled his mind to-night?

Gazing at his bright fire, Mr. Ibbotson's thoughts have travelled back to a certain wretched hearth, where a sickly woman and a shivering child are striving to warm their limbs over a heap of cinders begged of a charitable neighbour. He is thinking of a



penniless lad holding a horse at a rich man's door, to whom the rich man's son, in mere arrogance of spirit, deals a sharp tap with his riding-whip, on mounting, and bids the lad "not forget his bow next time." That penniless lad will sit side by side with the rich man's son at to-morrow's banquet, conferring not receiving honour. He is thinking of one dull winter's afternoon, when a young man but newly started in business paid a visit, in fear and trembling, to a certain bank-parlour, to obtain a little further credit wherewith to carry on his trade, and preferring his request with bated breath, was shown the door for his pains. The potentate who rebuffed him on that occasion, will, to-morrow, be unable to find words in the English language sufficiently eulogistic to apply to his quondam suitor; and after heaping all the virtues on his head, will refer in graceful terms to that period of "early

difficulties which energy and enterprise so honourably surmounted."

And as Mr. Ibbotson thinks of these things, and compares the old house in Brown's Court, where he was born amidst poverty and squalor, with the handsome room where he is now sitting, and contrasts the mattress of straw on which his mother died, with the damask couch at his side—he laughs a low exultant laugh, and his face wears a hard look of triumph. For these recollections bring no good influences with them, nor awake one sad or tender thought.

The timepiece had chimed twelve, and the fire was out, ere Mr. Ibbotson's reverie was at an end. Taking up his candle, he was about to retire, when his eye rested on the portrait of his son, painted by Miss Carpenter, which hung on the opposite wall.

"Bless him, he's a fine fellow!" exclaimed

the father, with involuntary admiration. "He shall make the account square one day, and pay off a few old scores for his father, please God!"

With which pious aspiration, Mr. Ibbotson retired to bed, but not to sleep. That future he foresaw for his son still haunted his thoughts, and the darkness was filled with pictures. He was assisting at public ceremonies where Frank was a foremost actor. He saw him carrying off school prizes and college honours, mixing with noblemen and scholars, and dispensing money with a liberal hand. Now, it was Frank in academic gown, anon in a barrister's wig. Could it be the warmth of the night that prevented him sleeping? Mr. Ibbotson got up and opened the window. It was dark and close. The tall shrubs in the garden were waving slowly to and fro in the night air; but the breeze that stirred

them was languid and unnaturally warm. Was it lightning that suddenly gleamed on the horizon? "Unwholesome sort of weather this," thought Mr. Ibbotson, closing the window—"never knew a November like it;" and he moved the night-lamp in order to shade his eyes from its light and get to sleep if possible.

But when he did fall asleep, it was no better. A horrible nightmare seized him. He was walking by the seashore with his boy one glorious summer's morning—the sky a sapphire-blue, the sea smooth as crystal—when suddenly, on the bosom of the placid waters, a white-crested billow rose, and ere there was time to flee, it broke on them in a great flood of surf, and tore his child away from him with a wild roar of joy. Then, he was sitting at to-morrow's banquet in the Town Hall, and when he rose to make a speech some one clutched his

shoulder from behind, and turning round he beheld his dead mother risen from the grave, at whose appearance the guests all fled and left him alone with her in the deserted hall. Mr. Ibbotson awoke hot and panting, his face bathed with perspiration, and his heart beating fast. The shadows from the night-lamp loomed heavily on walls and ceiling; the watch under the pillow ticked loud and fast in the silence.

“Hark! what was that?”

Mr. Ibbotson sat up and listened. Pshaw! It was nothing but the wind sighing round the house, and the laurels rustling their leaves from time to time. He lay down again, and heard the church clock strike three. Listening to the last stroke dying away, he fancied he heard a faint cry. It was so slight a sound that it might have been only a gust of passing wind, or a creaking bough outside. No, it was not that.

There it was again!—a feeble wail, and close at hand.

Mr. Ibbotson leaped from his bed and opened the door. On the mat outside stood a little figure in white, moaning and holding its hands to its throat. At the sight of his child, Mr. Ibbotson felt a sudden rush of blood to his head, and a sharp report went off in his ears. For a moment he thought his life was threatened by a fit.

“Frank! my boy! what’s the matter?”

The child made no reply, but moaned as before, and gazed round the room with wandering lustreless eyes.

“I can’t learn it, Thomas. ‘The curfew tolls the knell of parting day before the bright sun rises over the hill,’ can’t be right. They’ve put all the words wrong in the book, and—and—it’s very cold, I think.” The child shivered, and then, after trying again to repeat the words that troubled his

mind, said: "I have seen old Wormsley again, Thomas. He wanted me to take the measure for my grave under the church, but I ran away; and—and his hands were so thin and long. Oh!"

A shudder, that prolonged itself till he trembled from head to foot, passed over the boy; and then, with a plaintive cry of "Where is papa?" he fixed his wandering gaze upon his father's face and said, "Take me to him, will you?"

"I'm here, my boy. Don't you know your father? Lord help me!"

Mr. Ibbotson stood speechless for a moment, with the sweat standing in great drops upon his brow, and then, with a dreadful fear that his son was going to die, he took him in his arms and carried him to his own bed.

Ten minutes later, lights were glancing from all the windows of the house, and

Thomas, the groom, was flying through the silent streets in the direction of the red and purple lamp that shone above Mr. Lance's door.



## CHAPTER XV.

## MAYOR'S DAY.

“Good morning to you, Mr. Moggs. A busy day this for you political gentlemen? Pretty certain who is to be our Mayor this year, I hear. Well, I’m sure I hope it will give everybody satisfaction. Nothing so desirable as peace and quietness amongst neighbours, is there, Mr. Moggs?”

Before assenting to this amiable proposition, Mr. Moggs, to whom little Miss Crewels, taking a sniff of the morning air at her shop-door, was addressing the observation, looked cautiously up the street and down the street; and then, glancing warily round the Repository, motioned Miss Crewels,

in a mysterious manner, to retreat within-doors.

“True, marm, it *is* a busy day,” began Mr. Moggs, laying his umbrella on the counter and seating himself on the shop-stool; “and it’s pretty certain, too, who’ll be the Mayor of this town before many hours. My friend Sam Ibbotson is booked for that place, marm, no fear of that. But——,” here Mr. Moggs stopped and lowered his voice, “can you inform me how many tickets are sold for the dinner at the Town Hall?”

“That I really can’t, Mr. Moggs. I only know that Mrs. Brownsmith, at ‘The George,’ told me they had orders to provide for a hundred and fifty, and that she has never been luckier with her jellies, which stood as firm as rocks last night.”

“Mrs. Brownsmith is cooking a dinner that won’t be eaten this day, I fear,” said

Mr. Moggs, with an air of portentous mystery, and he shook his head and stared so hard that Miss Crewels almost screamed at him.

“Not eaten! Good gracious, Mr. Moggs, what’s the matter?”

Mr. Moggs told of the alarming illness that had befallen Mr. Ibbotson’s son, and then hurried away to spread the doleful intelligence amongst Mr. Ibbotson’s supporters.

A “Mayor’s Day,” to modern ears conveys the idea of an event of no great political importance or party excitement; but in years not long gone by, the election of the first magistrate of a borough, even in places of comparative insignificance, often created an amount of public disturbance and private enmity that would have done credit to a contested “General Election.” Already there was a certain swaggering demeanour

abroad in Market Mudling this morning ; and knots of idle corn-porters and bargemen were gathered about the doors of the inns and publichouses, ready to commit any breach of the peace required for a pint of beer and a shilling. But as the time for parading the town with a band of music, knocking off loose shutters, and running away with any unprotected wooden property for the bonfires, had not yet arrived, these worthy burghers had to confine their energies to disputing amongst themselves, and chaffing any unpopular public character who might chance to pass by.

Mr. Moggs had the misfortune to find himself the centre of one of these groups at the next street-corner.

“Here comes the jackal,” cried a wit. “We shall have the lion go by presently ;” and such a fire of personalities was launched at Mr. Ibbotson’s satellite, that Mr. Moggs

lost his temper, and threatened them with the police. Whereon the crown of Mr. Moggs's best hat was quickly battered in, the tails of his Sunday coat were wrenched off, and his whole person so hustled and maltreated that he was fain to take shelter in a neighbouring baker's shop, where he would certainly have hidden himself in the flour-bin had not the baker's wife interfered.

While Mr. Moggs was undergoing this rough usage at the hands of the populace, little Miss Crewels was hastening down to Northgate to carry to Miss Carpenter the news she had just heard. Being informed by Patty that her mistress was engaged at her easel, Miss Crewels gently opened the parlour-door and entered the room on tip-toe, by way of testifying her respect for the Fine Arts.

“My dear Miss Carpenter, I hope you will excuse me. I would not for worlds

disturb you in a moment—of—of——Oh, dear me, what is the word?”

“Inspiration, I suppose you mean,” said Rachel, laughing. “No fear of that, Miss Crewels; my poor pencil would lie idle a long time if I waited for moments of inspiration. I can’t afford to wait for those precious seasons, but I work whenever Patty doesn’t want me in the kitchen. Pray sit down; I wanted to see you, for I have some news to tell you.”

As Miss Crewels was never averse to hearing a little news, and as she knew what she had to tell herself would cause pain, she unfastened her bonnet-strings and sat down.

“I always tell Lawrence that you were my first patroness, and have a right to hear how I get on, Miss Crewels. When I become a celebrity, folks will point you out as the discoverer of my genius; we shall go

down to posterity together, Miss Crewels, I've no doubt."

"Oh, dear Miss Rachel, how can you talk so! I'm sure I often reproach myself with having those beautiful drawings of yours so long on hand, though really if I could have done you any good by it I would have had my likeness taken in all the different sizes and hung round the shop—indeed I would."

"I don't doubt it, Miss Crewels; but, joking apart, I have really something to tell you. I was sitting at my work one morning last week, when, hearing a sound of wheels, I looked up and saw a fine yellow chariot, and an elderly lady alighting at our gate. I knew at once that it must be the old lady at 'The George,' about whom I have heard so many funny tales of late, and I wondered what in the world brought her here. She stood and took an inspection of the house through her glass, and not until

she had well surveyed it, did she open the gate and walk in. As my hands were covered with paint, I made my escape, whilst Patty ushered the old lady in. On returning to the room, I found her standing on the hearthrug, looking up at that likeness of poor papa I copied from a miniature last winter, and so engrossed was she with it that she took not the slightest notice of my entrance. I gave a cough, moved a chair, but she never stirred. ‘Will you not take a seat?’ I was beginning, when she turned round, and said: ‘Had any one but you spoken, my dear young lady, I would have boxed their ears. How do you do?’ It was very difficult not to laugh; but the old lady looked so grave as she shook me by the hand that I didn’t. ‘Did you paint that picture, my child?’ she asked. ‘Well, well, your talent could not be better employed,’ and I thought I saw a tear glistening



in her eyes, as she patted my hand. Really one would have thought from her sympathetic manner that she had known it was poor papa."

Miss Carpenter stopped a moment to wash out a brush, and then continued: "And what do you think she had come for? To ask me to take her portrait, of all things! Yes; and she was so delicate about terms, and spoke so pleasantly of my brother (who has attended her from time to time), that we were not long in settling matters, and Miss Pyphos comes to give me a sitting every day, and behaves like the dearest, oddest old woman that ever was seen. That's my piece of news, Miss Crewels; and now what is yours?"

But Rachel's face changed, and her liveliness departed, when she heard what Miss Crewels had come to tell.

Whilst the news of his son's illness was

thus gradually becoming known throughout the town, Mr. Ibbotson was pacing to and fro in his dining-room, with a face that already looked years older, from the suspense and anxiety of the last few hours. From time to time he stopped suddenly in his walk—he was listening for any sounds from the sick-room overhead, where the doctors were in consultation. Mr. Ibbotson glanced anxiously at the clock every few minutes, and bit his nails. It was approaching the hour when he was due at the meeting of the Town Council.

“ Well—well, gentlemen ?” he ejaculated, impatiently, as the doctors at length entered the room.

Dr. Bucephalus, who was not to be thus hurried, and knew his importance as the only physician within thirty miles, drew off his gloves, took a seat and a quill pen, and looking at the inkstand for a minute, as though

balancing a prescription in his mind, said, "You'll send and have this made up immediately, Mr. Lance," before he made any answer to Mr. Ibbotson's enquiry.

"This is a sad business, Mr. Ibbotson," began the doctor, deigning to reply when he had finished writing, "a very sad business, and to-day of all days in the year! However, I don't see that we need apprehend any immediate danger. Your son is very ill, sir, and—and there is, I allow, a degree of obscurity about the case; but nature, sir, is kind, and our ministrations are powerful, sir, — powerful. I see no reason, therefore, under the existing circumstances, why you should absent yourself from your public duties this morning. I think, Mr. Lance, I address the Mayor-elect of our borough—eh?"

Mr. Lance bowed; Dr. Bucephalus smiled; but Mr. Ibbotson took no notice of either.

“If I go yonder, you’ll stop here,” he said, turning to Mr. Lance, “and send me word in an hour?”

“Certainly, Mr. Ibbotson, you may leave matters in my hands.”

Mr. Ibbotson rose, as though about to start out at once, but Mr. Lance stepped up to him, and with an air of embarrassment, whispered: “Better shave first, I think, and clean collar, eh? Hem! public opinion, you know.”

“Bless my soul!” Mr. Ibbotson felt his unshaven beard and glanced at himself in the glass. “Thank you, Lance. I’ll go and dress,” and with a hasty nod to the medical men, he left the room.

Agreeably to Mr. Moggs’s prediction, Mr. Samuel Ibbotson was elected Mayor of the borough of Market Mudling by a large majority. The cheer that greeted him as he left the Town Hall, arm-in-arm with the

Town Clerk, brought a flush of pride to his cheeks; and as he bowed to the noisy mob of partisans about the doors, and made his way down the High Street, followed by his friends, he felt his breast swell with pleasure that for the moment was unalloyed. A messenger, five minutes before, had put a slip of paper in his hand. It was a bulletin from Mr. Lance, reporting favourably of his patient, and advising that no change should be made in the proceedings of the day.

“You’ll get your dinner yet, Moggs,” whispered Mr. Ibbotson, in the ear of his satellite; “read that.” And his Worship’s face brightened, and he held his head more erect than he had done all the morning.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## A SHADOWED HEARTH.

THE shadows of the short November afternoon were gathering over the old Town Hall of Market Mudling. In the chief chamber of the Hall the Mayor's banquet lay spread; but, alas! neither Mayor nor guests were seated at the board. The roast pigs sent up a savoury steam from the kitchen below; the pheasants sat sarcastically viewing their own feathery tails; and the boar's-head grinned with a sardonic air at the boneless turkey, decked with sacrificial parsley and white ribbon. They were ready, but where were their consumers?

With a rueful eye Mrs. Brownsmith

veyed her jellies and blancmanges, which mocked her with their lustre; and with a melancholy shake of the head, Doggle, the town-crier and toast-master, contemplated the scarlet coat of his official livery, and the dozens of port and sherry drawn from the cellars of "The George." There was an end to all prospect of the dinner to-night. A despatch had been received by the Dinner Committee stating that Mr. Ibbotson could not possibly attend. Even the most inveterate lovers of roast-pig and venison could not but see the impropriety of sitting down to a Mayor's banquet without a Mayor to grace the feast. Keenly, therefore, as the gastronomes of Market Mudling felt their disappointment, they could do no other than acquiesce in the adjournment of the banquet.

But that section of Mr. Ibbotson's political party whose favour and goodwill depended on beer, bonfires, and other cheap aids to

popularity, did not see why they were to be done out of their evening's amusement, especially when they had carried the day and been promised a jollification. So, as soon as darkness set in, preparations for the bonfires were actively commenced, and the streets became alive with squibs and crackers. The ringers too, and the harmonic brass band, were not disposed to forego their share in the honours of the evening and the perquisites of the morrow ; and so the church-bells clashed, and the trombones brayed, and gunpowder exploded, and, in a short time, the whole town was in a state of high excitement, smoke, and tumult, according to immemorial usage on the 9th of November. Seeing the turn matters were taking, Miss Crewels, at an early period of the evening, ordered her apprentice to put up the shutters, and, retiring to the back-parlour, filled her ears with cotton-wool to deaden the revo-



lutionary sounds abroad, and refused to open her doors again to friend or foe that night.

While the public was thus bent on doing honour to the occasion, the man whom they fêted was sitting in his dining-room, with his face buried in his hands, and his head bowed upon his breast. He had returned home that afternoon to find his son taken suddenly worse, and a panic in the house. Servants were running to and fro, and poor Miss Cringe (in real hysterics this time) was screaming and sobbing in the hall, and no one taking the slightest notice of her.

“D—n that woman, put her to bed!” roared Mr. Ibbotson, with a sudden return of the old voice and manner; and Miss Cringe (utterly useless in such an emergency) was then and there carried off to her room and seen no more all night. This ebullition of anger having subsided, Mr. Ibbotson mounted the stairs and entered the sick-room.

His child was lying unconscious on the bed ; the doctor standing by with a grave face.

“ Worse, eh ? ” demanded Mr. Ibbotson, briefly. “ You sent me word he was better. How’s this ? ”

“ I did, Mr. Ibbotson, ” replied Mr. Lance ; “ but he is worse now, nevertheless. ”

“ And you advised me to go to yon dinner ? Pray do you know what’s the matter with the boy, or do you not ? ” Mr. Ibbotson looked fiercely across the bed at his friend and medical adviser.

“ I’ll tell you presently, sir—you are excited just now, ” retorted Mr. Lance, annoyed at the unwarrantable tone in which he was addressed.

“ Excited ! What the —— . Come, sir, answer my question ! ”

“ We won’t wrangle over your child’s sick-bed, Mr. Ibbotson, ” replied the doctor, repressing his temper. “ Your son has got

the fever, and I won't answer for the consequences."

"The — the fever?" stammered Mr. Ibbotson.

"Yes, *the* fever," and Mr. Lance turned away as he spoke.

"I—I—I won't believe it. Stop—stop—don't go!"

The doctor had only turned to reach a bottle of medicine on the drawers.

"I'm not going away, sir. Please to ring the bell."

Suddenly grown submissively dependent upon the man he was trying to bully, Mr. Ibbotson did as he was bid. Returning to the bedside, he stood and gazed in fearful silence on the little face lying on the pillow.

"Lance, I—I'll go downstairs." The man's voice faltered, as he turned away from the bed; but he curtly declined the doctor's offer to light him from the chamber.

Mr. Ibbotson descended to the dining-room, and sitting down by the fireside, his head sank upon his breast, and he sat there alone with his thoughts (how changed from those of the night before!) until the twilight fell upon the chamber.

Ere long the twilight had deepened into night, but Mr. Ibbotson still sat there, stunned with the blow that had fallen on him, and slowly realising the terrible calamity at hand.

Had it come then to this—that his son's life was threatened by the disease which he had ignored and scoffed at, when others were its victims? Was it possible that this sickness could have disappeared from his property only to return and force its way within his own doors? Ay, and men would cry, "A judgment on him—a judgment!" and his enemies would view it as a retribution from on High.

Well might the man groan, and hide his face between his hands ! Well might he, at the sight of the picture which had caused him such pleasant reveries overnight, burst out weeping as he had never wept since his birth ! The discovery of his son's danger had, at last, melted the crust of worldliness and self-deception that had grown about his heart. At that moment (transient as the emotion was) he would have given every shilling he possessed to save his child.

And, as if to mock his anguish at this moment, a sound of cheering and huzzaing—a roar of distant voices—reached his ears ; it was the crowd shouting round the bonfire in the marketplace. An explosion followed ; it was the Corporation cannon going off. The room grew light, and a ruddy glow played on the walls and ceiling. Then came a windy sound of bells, and a din of distant drums and fifes. The whole

town was astir and bent on revelry. Mr. Ibbotson ground his teeth and muttered an oath.

While thus the Mayor was passing the first hours of the night of triumph he had so long anticipated, Rachel Carpenter and her brother sat by their fireside in Northgate. Rachel was sewing, and Lawrence reading aloud from a volume he had just taken down from the bookcase behind him. Though Rachel appeared to be listening attentively, the tear which glistened on her cheek was not called forth by the poet's spell. She was thinking of the news Miss Crewels had brought her that morning. The clock on the mantelpiece had just struck nine, when the reader's voice was suddenly interrupted by a hurried ringing at the gate. The book was laid aside, and the next minute Patty ushered in Mr. Julius Lance.

In a few words the visitor explained the

object of his visit — it was to ask Mr. Carpenter to accompany him immediately to Montezuma House, to see Mr. Ibbotson's son.

“ Mr. Ibbotson wishes to have another opinion. No objection on my part to meet any professional gentleman ; but thinking that, owing to—to peculiar circumstances, you might decline to attend, Mr. Ibbotson begged me to step in and explain.”

“ Mr. Ibbotson need not doubt my willingness to give any aid I can. I am at your service, Mr. Lance—Rachel, help me on with my coat.”

Such was the expedition of all concerned, that in less than ten minutes Mr. Carpenter and his companion (taking a bye-route to avoid the rabble in the streets) had reached the doors of Montezuma House.

When Mr. Carpenter entered the dining-room, he at first failed to distinguish his old

opponent, for he sat in the farther corner of the room. As the doctor advanced, Mr. Ibbotson drew his chair still further back, purposely to shade his face from view.

“You know what’s happened, sir?” began the afflicted man, in a husky voice, as soon as he had requested Mr. Lance to leave the room. “He’s told you why I’ve sent for you, I suppose? Well, sir, I want to know whether—whether you can—that is—what your opinion of the case is—you understand?”

“Certainly,” replied the doctor, for there was a pause here, during which Mr. Ibbotson drummed his fingers restlessly on the arm of his chair.

“I don’t expect folks to work for me without good pay, you know,” continued Mr. Ibbotson, but without raising his head whilst he spoke. “Plain speaking saves words. Will you—can you, save my son,



sir? There's a cheque on that table for a hundred guineas, which you'll oblige me by taking up?"

The abruptness of this unexpected proposal rendered Mr. Carpenter dumb for the moment.

"Not enough, sir, eh? Well, then, I'll double it," went on Mr. Ibbotson with haste, mistaking the doctor's silence. "Name the figure, sir, and it shall be yours, but for God's sake save the boy!"

"Mr. Ibbotson, whatever I do for your son, I am bound to do, as an honest man, in virtue of my calling. For the sake of my professional reputation alone, I should be a dolt not to use my best efforts to cure him. If you can see, sir, that it is to my private interest to try and save your son's life, perhaps I need not say any more. I beg you will put by that cheque, and let me be shown upstairs."

The allusion to "private interest" was not without its due weight. Mr. Ibbotson felt the force of the argument, and, concluding the speaker was no fool there, begged him to walk upstairs.

It was with unaffected sorrow that Mr. Carpenter beheld the sick boy when he approached the bed. There was no mistaking the nature of the disease. The doctor had witnessed it too often, alas! not to know its signs at a glance. After a short pause, he turned away to convey, as gently as he could, his fears to the father. But almost at the first word Mr. Ibbotson stopped him—the veins swelled in his forehead, and he looked as if he would have struck the speaker had he continued. And yet, five minutes later, the man was standing on the staircase outside, crying like a child, and begging Mr. Carpenter to "bear him no malice, but let bygones be bygones." What

promises and protestations Mr. Ibbotson would have made in this abject state of mind Mr. Carpenter could only surmise. He was recalled to the sick-room.

Meanwhile, the alarm and disquiet that had come upon the household increased rather than abated as the night advanced. The kitchen (which had been in low spirits all day) had worked itself up by night into a highly nervous and superstitious state of mind. The cook, who had been on the look-out for bad omens all the evening, and had made a point of examining every bit of coal that flew out of the fire to see whether it resembled a coffin, declared that she couldn't go to bed in her present frame of mind "not for gold untold," and proposed that they should all sit up after supper, to bear one another company, and have a little hot ale, spiced, with dry toast, by the kitchen-fire—"that is," continued cook, "if Miss Veal don't

object." Miss Veal, who was a dressmaker, and the housemaid's cousin, had dropped in, to bring home the cook's new Sunday mantle, and, being of a sympathetic disposition, had not required much persuasion to stay supper with her afflicted friends, or to partake of the hot ale, which was handed round by the scullerymaid.

"Come, Thomas, you musn't give way, you know. It's a world of trouble, and we're born to grief like the flowers of the field, as neither toils nor spins," remonstrated cook. "Take a drop now, you ain't touched nothing all day."

"No, thank'ee," said the man, scarcely raising his head.

"Well, we all know what's best for us at these times," remarked the housemaid, with a sigh. "When Sister Brown's youngest was took, I couldn't have eaten a morsel if you had paid me. And I always did say as

Master Frank was more like Susannah Brown than any child I ever saw—as well you knows, Jane Veal.”

Miss Veal assented; and thereupon followed a conversation on infant deathbeds, ghostly warnings, and other like topics of a lively nature, in the course of which it appeared that nearly every person present had always foreseen the present calamity, and foretold it to their friends and acquaintances in prophetic moments. “When I spilled the saltbox, yesterday, I knew it wasn’t far off,” remarked cook. “Lor’, Mary! Hark! What’s that?”

A queer noise, certainly, but not supernatural. Betsy, the scullerymaid, sitting outside the fireside circle, as became a person of her grade, had fallen asleep, and was snoring frightfully—a breach of manners that the housemaid indignantly resented, and demanded whether she (Betsy) “didn’t

know better than to sit snoring there, at such a time as this, frightening everybody out of their wits."

The conversation was resumed, and might have lasted all night, had not Miss Veal interrupted her cousin, just as the clock was about to strike twelve, by solemnly demanding "whether the company didn't observe a winding-sheet in the candle,"—a remark which almost paralysed the cook, and cast such a gloom over the whole kitchen that no one dared to look over his or her shoulder for the next five minutes.

It was at this solemn juncture that Betsy, the scullerymaid, who was wide-awake now, and enjoying a cool seat near the door, uttered a shrill scream, and suddenly became cataleptic. Outraged at what they deemed this wanton trifling with their feelings, the cook and housemaid were about to pour a jug of water on the maiden's head, when

Thomas, who had been sitting quietly by the fire all the time, suddenly said, "Hush!" and lifted up his hand in an authoritative manner. Everyone listened, and everyone turned pale, as they heard a strange noise in the passage without. Even Thomas did not offer to go and see what it was. There were footsteps, with a sound like an iron-shod staff striking on the stone pavement. The next minute the door was pushed open, and an ugly decrepit old woman, with a bundle of rags on her back and a short pipe in her mouth, stood on the threshold. The housemaid shrieked, the cook dropped her glass of ale, and Miss Veal showed a strong disposition to faint.

"Don't frighten yourselves, ladies; I wouldn't hurt a hair o' your heads. It's no' but poor old Nan, as has bought many a good shillin's worth o' bones and grease o' you, Miss Lees, and many a old shoe or a



bottle o' you, Mr. Thomas. It's ages, though, sin' I've seen any of you, ain't it? I'll make so bould as to step in and warm my old limbs, by your leave."

The rag-gatherer approached the fire, and seating herself on a stool, knocked the ashes out of her pipe and laid down her bundle.

"I've been comin' to see you for long past, my dears; but this mornin' I felt as how I must set my foot within these doors afore another sun rose, and so I've walked two-and-twenty miles this blessed day—two-and-twenty miles! I ain't come an hour too soon, after all—not an hour."

As she uttered the last words, Nan Sludge (for it was none other than the incorrigible tenant Mr. Ibbotson had expelled from Wild's End) looked steadfastly at the fire.

"And what may your business be, Mrs. Sludge?" inquired Thomas, eyeing their visitor with small approval.



The old woman vouchsafed no reply ; she was, or pretended to be, unconscious of the man's remark.

“ She's getting hard of hearing, Thomas,” said cook, who had recovered from her alarm. “ Will you take a little warm ale, Mrs. Sludge—it will do you good ?”

“ Lor,' don't she look like a witch ! I'm sure I wouldn't go so near her, cook, if I was you,” whispered the housemaid. “ It makes my blood run cold to see her sitting there like that.”

“ The poor old critter looks uncommon badly,” replied cook, who had a Samaritan's heart. “ Come, Nan, have a drop of this. What's brought you here to-night, eh ?”

The old rag-gatherer took no notice of the glass offered her, but sat as before.

“ What's come to her ?” remarked cook, in amazement. “ Oh, Lord, she's a-cryin' !”

A great tear, in truth, was rolling down

the old woman's grizzled cheeks, and her hands trembled convulsively.

"What's the matter, mum?" asked Thomas, surprised at the sight.

The old woman began talking slowly to herself, while the tears coursed one another down her dirty face.

"He lived but nine summers, did my poor lad—nine summers; and when they took him away he was thin as a ghost wi' want o' vittles. It's longer ago than I could count. Jack went last—he was a man grown, and I've seen many a cold winter since then. Lord! Lord! I hadn't a bit o' bread to give my little lad—I hadn't; and he cried, and said, 'Mother, I wish I'd been born a dog, and lived with the hounds up at the Squire's kennels; they gets warm porridge, and rare bits of vittle.' And I got drunk the night he died; and pawned my clothes to bury him decent, I did." The

old woman bent her head at these recollections, and wrung her withered hands.

“Poor soul! she’s known some trouble in her time, I’ll warrant,” ejaculated cook, compassionately.

“Trouble? Who talks o’ trouble?” demanded Nan, looking fiercely around on the bystanders. “Ay, woman, these hairs didn’t turn grey wi’out cause!” She pushed back her tangled locks from her face. “Would you think I’d ever been owt but a poor dirty old beast? Would you think I was a mother once, and nursed children in these arms? See there!” She thrust her hand into her bosom, and drew out a scrap of paper yellow with age, which she carefully unfolded. “Look! that’s her hair—my own poor lassie’s hair—as handsome a girl as ever stepped—but she had better been ugly and crippled from her birth! She went wrong, and what drove her? Why, want o’

food and clothing, and the sight o' her brothers and sisters starvin' to death. And when she came home to die—which she did, poor soul! two years after, and walked bare-foot all the way for seventy miles—they came and took the bed she lay on to pay the rint, and I hadn't so much as a sixpence in the house. 'Tell Sam Ibbotson,' says I, 'that you found this girl lyin' dying, and tell him that her mother's curse will cleave to him long as he lives! Tell him that, sinner as I am, I wouldn't change places wi' him. The bed he's making for hisself he'll have to lie down on one day!'—Oh, my poor bairns! my poor bairns!"

As she spoke, the old woman took the faded lock of hair in her fingers, gazed at it ruefully, and then, folding it up again with careful hands, rocked herself to and fro, and moaned dismally, to the discomfiture of all present.

“Do you think,” she went on, after a pause, “that I’ve walked a score miles and more just to buy a few bones, or an old rag or two, eh? Not I—good Lord! I’ve come because I couldn’t do no other. I’ve come because of my dream last night, and I ain’t come an hour too soon. The child will be dead afore another sun shines.”

“Oh, don’t you talk o’ that way, Nan—I can’t abear to hear you.” Cook put her apron to her eyes and sobbed audibly. The rest of the kitchen was equally affected. “Talk, woman? my talk won’t harm the bairn. Poor little lad! he’d got eyes like my Jack’s. He was too good for this bad world. It’s only the rubbish as is left long here. He’ll be gone to his home afore mornin’. Hark—there!”

As Nan spoke a bell rang furiously, and a confused noise of voices and moving feet was heard. Thomas ran into the hall, and

found his master putting on his hat and coat to leave the house, while Mr. Carpenter was trying to prevent him.

“Let me go, I say! I’ll have post horses to London, and bring a doctor down who *can* cure him. Do you think I’ll see my child die, and not try to save him? Leave go!—do you think I’m mad?”

“Yes, Mr. Ibbotson, to propose such a thing. You shall not go, if I can prevent it. Listen to me one moment. Would you go, if I were to tell you that, if you did, you would not be near your child in his last moments?”

Mr. Ibbotson seemed staggered; he suffered his hat to be taken from him, and sat down on one of the hall chairs.

“But you will save him?” he demanded, grasping the doctor’s arm, and looking imploringly into his face. “Think, sir, he is my only child—all I have to care

for. I can't see him die like this. Oh, Lord, it will kill me !”

Mr. Carpenter, who was greatly affected by the sight of this passionate grief, and the tearing off of all disguises in this hour of agony, succeeded in persuading the afflicted man to return to the sick-room.

The firelight shed a warm glow on the rich hangings of the bed, but the greater part of the room was in shadow, save where the light of a lamp on the drawers fell on the white bedclothes and the little figure stretched there. The attitude of the sick child was more peaceful now ; he lay with his eyes half opened, breathing more freely. Above, on the ceiling, a huge shadow, as of a hooded figure, loomed half across the chamber, where the lamp and firelight mingled.

The child gave a sigh as they approached the bed ; he had been watching the shadow



for some minutes past. It had been there all night, and disturbed him many a time when he gazed at it in a half-conscious state. He turned away his head, and then, as he beheld his father, smiled faintly.

“I’m glad you’ve come, papa,” he began, in a voice so low as to be almost a whisper. “The room has been so dark, and there have been such strange things about the bed. Papa, you have been crying?”

They were the first lucid words the child had uttered since his seizure. With a sudden flutter of hope, Mr. Ibbotson turned and looked at the doctor. Mr. Carpenter’s face was, if anything, more serious than before.

“Is that you, Mr. Carpenter?” the boy went on. “You mended my dog’s leg, sir, didn’t you?”

The hand which the little fellow here stretched out to the doctor fell feebly back on the bed, and his eyes closed again. The



hooded figure on the ceiling trembled in the flickering firelight, and advanced with a threatening gesture. "Papa," began the child, reopening his eyes after a pause, "was I a very little boy when mamma died? I think she would know me again, don't you?"

"You—you are ill, my boy—you are wandering. Don't talk like that."

Mr. Ibbotson clasped his child's little hand in his big palm, and looked at him with a face full of unutterable grief.

"How cold your hand is, papa—and—and how still it is! I can't hear the clock ticking on the drawers; it has stopped."

Mr. Ibbotson could hear not only the ticking clock, but every beat of his own heart, which seemed as though it would burst his bosom.

"When I get well, papa, I mean to go over to Belton Wood to get some fresh food

for my rabbit, and some ferns for Miss Carpenter to paint. I dreamed I was there with Ben Tyler last night, but—but"—here the child gasped for breath for a moment—"but I had not asked him to go with me, because I knew you wouldn't like it. I found him there, dressed like Robinson Crusoe, living all alone in a hut with a green parrot. He had a gun too, but he didn't know how to shoot with it."

The effort of uttering these words exhausted the child so much that he lay motionless for the next few minutes, breathing almost imperceptibly. Then he began to talk again, but incoherently, and in a wandering way, evidently growing weaker every moment. His father bent over him, but it was with difficulty he could catch his words. Mr. Ibbotson sank down into his chair in a state of stupor.

It was growing near morning, when the unhappy man was roused by his son's voice asking faintly, "Are you there, papa?"

"Yes, my boy," he murmured, in a choking voice.

The boy looked upwards, while a feeble smile gleamed across his childish face. "See, how beautiful, and good! Like Jacob's dream!"

The hush that followed—broken only by the heavy breathing of the dying child, and the choking sound in Mr. Ibbotson's throat—was so deep that in it Mr. Carpenter could hear the very rustle of the ivy on the wall outside.

"I cannot see you," murmured the little voice from the bed; "but it is light, and—and I am not afraid."

The boy tried to advance his lips towards his father's face, but he could not move now.

There were a few more moments of struggle, a little further contest between flesh and spirit, and then a quick spasm, a sudden fixing of the features; and ere the hooded shadow on the ceiling was swallowed up in gloom by the rapid sinking of the fire, the child was with Him who bade us suffer the little children to come unto Him.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE RIGHT WOMAN IN THE RIGHT PLACE.

“So you are tired at last of the society of a selfish old woman? Eh, Miss Forrester, is that what you mean?” As she spoke, Miss Pyphos’s face assumed an aggrieved, almost an aggressive, air.

“On the contrary, I appreciate your kindness more every day, and fear I make but a poor return for it, Miss Pyphos. When you advertised for ‘a cheerful companion,’ you had not a dull person like myself in your mind’s eye, I think?”

“And suppose I hadn’t? I may fancy a dull person now, if I like, eh? Nothing like opposition for some folks. If you had

been lively, I should probably have been dull."

"You are very kind," replied Miss Forrester, with an emotion which she tried hard to hide; "but—but—I feel myself compelled to leave you, and seek another situation, as I was trying to explain."

"And you explain very badly," said Miss Pyphos.

"I am afraid I seem ungrateful," continued Miss Forrester, looking more anxious than ever; "but since you tell me that you may possibly remain here altogether, I think I ought to let you know that I have friends in this town whom I cannot meet without pain, and that I feel I ought to have—to have—left you before," added Miss Forrester, stammeringly.

"Thank you, madam; you are kind and polite, certainly. I hate mysteries, Miss Forrester."

The young lady looked dreadfully uneasy, and, with tears in her eyes, replied—"I would explain if I could, but—but——" Here she stopped, and with a little sob, went on: "I will write fully to you when I get away, Miss Pyphos. You have been very good to me, and I cannot thank you; and I fear you would only think me a hypocrite if I were to try." And Miss Forrester turned away her head.

"Tut, tut!" cried Miss Pyphos. "This will never do. Put away that handkerchief. You shall have your way, and leave me to-morrow, if you wish it, certainly. But let me observe that I think you will change your mind again before the clock strikes ten to-night. *I* know what a woman's caprices are. Packing! Oh, of course; go and do your packing, by all means. Ah! ah! ah!" And as Miss Forrester quitted the room, Miss Pyphos threw herself back in her

chair and laughed till she cried again. "Poor soul! it's a shame to laugh at her, but I can't help it. Now, any one who didn't know me would think I was an unfeeling old wretch. But I think, Miss Pyphos, you have nearly satisfied your discerning mind. You are a very prudent person, but you need not fear to take the steps you meditate."

Shaking her head sagaciously, as she thus addressed herself, the old lady drew out her watch, and rang the bell for the carriage to be brought round to the door, adding an order for a hot supper on such an extensive scale that Pinkett positively sighed with compassion, feeling sure that her reason had now fled for ever.

Miss Pyphos was bent, it appeared, on exciting astonishment wherever she went to-day. First, she ordered the carriage to stop at Puff, the confectioner's, where she



created an immense sensation by ordering a wedding-cake—the biggest that could be manufactured. Then she drove on to the milliner's, and remained one hour in consultation with Miss Pallytoe, issuing from her shop with such a quantity of parcels that it took ten minutes to get them packed in the carriage. That done, the yellow chariot proceeded to the linendraper's; next to the shoemaker's, until at last—after exciting the wildest suspicions in the tradespeople's minds, and causing the coachman to wink so often at the shop-assistants that it was a wonder he ever recovered the natural use of his eyes—they stopped at the little Berlin-woolshop in Church Lane. It was clear to the meanest comprehension that Miss Pyphos contemplated matrimony.

“Now, Miss Crewels, I have not come to buy wools or needles, so don't show me any.

How do you do?" began Miss Pyphos, as soon as she had set foot in the shop. "Where are those drawings you told me of the other day? Pack them all up and bring them on to my hotel to-night, and I'll settle for them. Seen Miss Carpenter lately? How is she?"

"Well, madam, not so well as I could wish. You see, the burial of Mr. Ibbotson's son took place yesterday, and she felt it much, of course—as who did not, indeed? A more beautiful and sumptuous funeral I never saw. Seventeen mourning-coaches, ma'am—every shop closed in the High Street, and all Mr. Ibbotson's workpeople walking two-and-two, in black scarves and gloves. It is said we've never had such a funeral in the town since old Lady Rooke died. And the money that was spent! It must have been a good hundred pounds in some people's pockets, though I'm sure I

should be the last person to grudge my neighbours any little profit in the way of trade, especially when all the black-edged paper and cards were ordered of me, which I thought a very nice attention."

"Ah! that poor man has done his best to show to the world how he loved his son," said Miss Pyphos, gravely. "I caught sight of his face yesterday, in the mourning-coach; it was a pitiful spectacle. But I must be going. Don't forget to bring on those things to 'The George' this evening; and tell Mr. Bruce I expect him punctually at nine." And with the same lively haste that had characterised all her movements this morning, the old lady hurried out of the shop, and was driving back to the hotel ere another minute.

How Miss Pyphos spent the rest of that day was a secret known only to herself. She retired to her own room, and gave strict

orders that she was not to be disturbed on any account. It was growing dark when the bell of her room was rung in haste, and an order for an umbrella and a pair of clogs was issued, through the door, to her maid outside. "See that there is no one about on the staircase, Phillips," whispered Miss Pyphos, through the keyhole; and the next minute the old lady issued from the room, muffled up in a shawl and veil, and stole down the staircase as mysteriously as a young lady about to elope.

"Where *are* you agoin', mem, this wet night? I'm sure you'll get your death, mem," remonstrated the maid.

"Ask no questions, Phillips, and I'll tell you no stories. Mind my instructions are carried out to the letter. I shall be home to supper." And so saying, Miss Pyphos opened her umbrella and issued nimbly out into the street.

“If she wasn’t old enough to be my grandmother, I’d vow that was a love-letter she’s been writing all the afternoon, and is now going to post,” ejaculated Phillips, looking after her mistress, with a puzzled face. “Oh, Mr. Pinkett! how you made me jump!” The waiter had suddenly bolted out of a pantry near. “I declare you have given me quite a turn!”

“Begging your pardon, miss, as a friend, I ask, do you think it’s safe and proper? She’s been going a long time, but she’ll be worse afore many hours.” Here Pinkett looked tragically at the waiting-maid, and went on: “Such expressions as she’s made use of this day—such orders as she’s give—no woman in her senses ever used or give before. I ain’t proud, but when a woman calls me ‘a chattering biped,’ and ‘a male Malyprop,’ I think it’s time to take it up. It ain’t you, Miss Phillips—it ain’t the

quiet party as keeps company as I complains of. I'm a peaceable man, but if she was of the other sex I'd pull her nose, if she stood six foot high!"

Fired with this warlike idea, Pinkett commenced sparring at an imaginary Miss Pyphos with such ardour that Phillips beat a retreat.

While the above conversation was taking place, Miss Pyphos's conduct was also under discussion elsewhere in Market Mudling. Patty Clegg, Mr. Carpenter's servant, had taken occasion, upon carrying in tea to-night, to inform her mistress that "the old lady at 'The George' was going to be married before the week was out; and it was true, for Puff's man had heard her order the wedding-cake that very day, and Miss Pallytoe's young women were going to work extra hours to get on with the dresses." But Patty's piece of news was not received with

much attention to-night. Rachel merely pointed to her brother, who sat before a pile of papers and account-books, as a signal for Patty to retire.

Well, Lawrence, what conclusion have you arrived at?" inquired Rachel, as soon as the door was closed.

"That I shall be bankrupt in less than twelve months, if things go on at this rate. I have not earned £50 since last Christmas. Have you never thought we should do well to try our luck on the other side of the globe, Rachel?"

"Oh, Lawrence, you don't really mean to emigrate?——" Rachel stopped, and then added, "Of course I would go if you did, Lawrence," in a tone that almost brought tears to her brother's eyes.

They were both silent for a few minutes. Though uttered thus suddenly and lightly, Mr. Carpenter's words afforded

food for serious reflection, as they sat regarding the fire. Rachel was the first to speak. She had turned the matter over in her mind, and with the hopeful enthusiasm of her nature, was almost ready to approve and encourage the design.

“I believe I *could* milk a cow, Lawrence ; and I’m sure I could wash, iron, and cook as well as most girls. Only I should be so frightened at the natives. I shouldn’t like to go where there were natives, Lawrence ; for I daren’t fire a gun at them, I’m sure—not if I saw them carrying off all the cows and sheep on the farm.”

“Then you won’t do for the Bush, you little coward,” said the Doctor, with a smile.

Whilst her master and mistress were thus discussing their dark outlook in the future, Patty was quarrelling with herself in the kitchen. It had not required great pene-



tration on Patty's part to discover that there was something amiss in the parlour, nor to divine its cause.

"And me to go and talk o' weddings an' such like, just as though I couldn't see how 'eavy their poor hearts is!" muttered Patty, reproachfully to herself.

Patty's evening cup had not its usual relish to-night. Her tears moistened her bread-and-butter as she sat looking dolefully at the fire. Thus engaged, Patty was conscious of a low knock at the surgery door. "That's some poor body wants a dose of physic gratis. Why can't they come in a morning, as they should do? Now, Mrs. Pinch," said Patty, as she opened the surgery door, "if that's you, I'm ashamed on you. You know it's after hours. Nine an' ten in the mornin' is master's time for seeing you folks."

"Hush, hush, my good girl. Don't talk

so loudly," said the visitor, who wore a thick veil, and was muffled up in a shawl. "I have a word to say to you. Let me step into the surgery, and be as still as you can. You don't know me, Patty—eh?"

"No, nor I don't want to. You go along on your own business, and don't stand Pattying me. I'm not going to let you walk in and carry off what you can lay your hands on. Come, be off!" And Patty, who suspected felonious intentions on the part of this nocturnal visitor, prepared to resist an entry if necessary.

"Quite right, Martha (I won't call you Patty, if it offends you). Protect your master's property, like a good girl. But I have not come to pilfer. My name is Pyphos. I am the old lady from 'The George,' and I want you to do me a favour."

"Goodness gracious!" Patty bethought

her of the news, and retreated a step in her amazement. "If she's going to ask me to help her to run away to get married, I'll expose her, an old fool!" reflected Patty.

"Now, you see this guinea, Martha?" began Miss Pyphos, as she stepped into the surgery. "Well, this shall be yours, if you'll take this letter to Mr. ——"

"No, marm," interrupted Patty, with virtuous indignation; "I'll not be made a go-between. You ought to have something else to think of than lovers and love-letters, at your time o' life. I'd be ashamed o' myself to come and ask such a thing of a respectable girl!"

"Are you mad, silly creature?" exclaimed Miss Pyphos. "Who mentioned love-letters? I want you to take this note to your master, without saying who left it, and to allow me to remain in the house a few

minutes until he has read it. Now run along with it, and I'll wait here."

"You promise me, on your honour as a lady, that this letter's all right and won't cause mischief, and I'll take it,—not without."

"I can promise you that, Martha. It will rather bring good-luck and happiness to us all, I trust."

Thus assured, Patty no longer hesitated, but hastened away to the parlour, and placed the letter before her master, with a nonchalance that did credit to her powers of intrigue.

It lay some minutes on the table before Mr. Carpenter opened it; for Patty's ingenious remark—"Bill again, I s'pose, sir,"—had not increased his desire to learn its contents. The exclamation that escaped his lips as he read the first few lines caused Rachel to raise her head from her work;

the agitation that overspread his face, as he continued, caused her to rise from her chair and bend over his shoulder. Together they read what follows:—

“MY DEAR NEPHEW AND NIECE,—Would I had earned the right to address you thus before ! But I didn’t, and so it’s of no use regretting it. I am not going to be pathetic, or even prosy, if I can help it.

“You may remember to have heard your parents (whose memory I know you affectionately treasure) mention Aunt Barbara—a proud worldly young woman, who had many a hard lesson to learn before she cut her wisdom teeth, and who chafed and bit the curb of experience, even when she had cut them, till she nearly broke them all again. That same Aunt Barbara never forgave her brother for marrying a girl whose only fault was her poverty. Miss

Barbara had good looks, some wit, and great expectations, having been adopted by a distant female relative of considerable wealth, who brought her up and made her a worldly woman, bent on making a brilliant *parti*, and establishing herself well in life. The *parti* offered itself in time. Barbara was to become a titled lady, and go to court—not St. James's, but the Tuileries; for she was living in Paris, and Le Comte de N—— held one of the oldest titles in France. Everything was rose-coloured, and the sky without a cloud—until the eve of the marriage, that is. It pleased the Disposer of all events to terminate the life of the bridegroom by a sudden and violent death, the very night when the bride stood before her glass trying on her bridal garments for the morrow; and the blood of the dying man stained her white robe as he was carried lifeless past her. The bride's heart

did not break (though God knows it was a cruel shock), for the bride's heart (to tell the truth) had not been so much interested in the match as her pride and self-love. She left Paris, and travelled from one gay place to another with her rich relative for some years ; until one winter's night, on quitting a ball-room at Rome, her friend was seized with paralysis and died in twelve hours, leaving Barbara Carpenter the whole of her large fortune, on condition that she should bear her name for the rest of her days. As Miss Barbara's matrimonial views had been gradually undergoing a change of late years, she acquiesced in the arrangement, and assumed the name of Pyphos, with the resolution of dying an old maid. In that capacity she has visited most of the capitals of Europe—not scandalising her neighbours or revoking at whist more

frequently than any other maiden lady of her age. She might still have been pursuing that enviable career, had not a sudden desire to return home and find out her brother's children seized her one summer's evening, as she sat watching a family group assembled round the door of a chalet in the Oberland. Acting on that impulse (which her better nature told her was a right one), Aunt Barbara set off home, and made diligent search for her nephew and niece. But for a long time she could find no clue to them, such changes had twenty years' absence effected. That she did find them at length, however, Aunt Barbara is now prepared to prove. That she has studied their characters, and grown acquainted with their tastes and habits, in a secret and surreptitious manner, Aunt B. is ready to admit. That she has reason to admire and respect them, she is proud to acknowledge; and



that she hopes and thinks they will not disown her, but admit her to some small share of their love and esteem, is the reason she dares to sign herself,

“ Their affectionate Aunt,  
“ BARBARA PYPHOS (*née* CARPENTER).

“ P.S.—I am waiting outside, my dears. May I come in ? I have a great deal to say.”

Of course Aunt Barbara came in, and of course she had a great deal to say. Of course Aunt Barbara and Rachel embraced, and of course they cried. Equally a matter of course was it that they should all sit and talk together by the fireside for some time in a sober and serious mood, and ultimately adjourn to “ The George ” Hotel, where they found Miss Forrester and Mr. Bruce awaiting them in one apartment, and a splendid supper in the next.

That everybody was very surprised and delighted—that Miss Forrester reconsidered her intention of departing on the morrow, and that Miss Crewels shed a great many tears and expressed immense sympathy with everybody—may be readily divined. That Mr. Carpenter, moreover, looked very happy, and Rachel and Mr. Bruce were very lively and amusing (the former declaring she felt like a character in a story-book, where some one always “turns out” to be somebody else’s long-lost child or parent at the last chapter), were all things probable enough. But that Miss Pyphos should rise from her seat at the end of supper and make a speech was a thing neither probable nor at all looked for, especially as she wound up by the remarkable declaration that “she never was in favour of long engagements, and should therefore request her friend, the Reverend Arthur Bruce, to unite in holy matrimony,

within seven days from that date, her nephew Lawrence Carpenter and her friend Catherine Forrester, in the parish church of Market Mudling.”

Whereupon Miss Pyphos resumed her seat, and Miss Forrester held down her head to hide her tears and blushes, and Lawrence essayed to make a speech in return, but broke down, and Rachel tried to help him, but couldn't; and everybody was fain to have recourse to a general shaking of hands, to hide their own and everybody else's emotion.

The excitement in Number Thirteen had so far communicated itself to the rest of the household, that Pinkett averred that he “didn't know whether he was on his head or his heels;” and in proof of the disordered state of his intellect, it may be mentioned that he rushed into the kitchen crying out, “Coffee for tea and two for one”—

an order which nearly sent the cook into a fit.

“But, my dear aunt,” whispered Rachel to Miss Pyphos, as they sat side by side after supper, “you have not yet told us how you came to find us after all. And how could you know that Lawrence and Catherine had been engaged?”

“Why, through this absurd little ‘Friendship’s Offering’ here, a birthday gift from yourself to Catherine Forrester, when you were at school together at Kensington. I found it one day on the table, a short time after Miss Forrester came to live with me, and, struck with the name, I inquired who Miss Rachel Carpenter might be. Miss Forrester’s answers, which were not delivered with her usual frankness, set me thinking, and the result was that, by dint of sundry cross-examinations and a little finesse, I extracted from her enough to make me pretty

sure that *her* friend was *my* niece, and that probably *my* nephew was, or had been, *her* suitor. On that assumption I decided to come down here, and discover for myself what sort of people my relatives were. I am afraid, my dear, you'll think me a sad old hypocrite, when I tell you that I have watched you and your brother for the last few months as closely and warily as though I had been a detective officer. Can you forgive the distrustfulness of an old woman who has been deceived and duped many a time during the threescore years of her life, and whose views of human nature are not so generous or trustful as they once were?"

The old lady's hand trembled as she laid it on that of her niece. Rachel pressed it gently, and murmured a hope that in the love and gratitude of her newly-found relatives she would find her old confidence in humanity restored.

And so it came about that the bells of Market Mudling rang a wedding peal ere seven days passed ; and Miss Pyphos's seemingly inappropriate orders at the milliner's and pastrycook's were found to have been given with that judicious forethought which distinguished all that lady's proceedings.

Backed by the pecuniary influence of his wealthy relative, Mr. Carpenter soon became successful in his profession. It was surprising what confidence the public reposed in his medical skill as soon as he removed to a larger house, and was reported to be the heir to the wealthy old lady at "The George."

One of the first steps taken by that same old lady, after the marriage of her nephew, was to establish herself in a fine old mansion that had long been vacant in the outskirts of the town, whither she was accompanied by Rachel, who was henceforth to live with her.

“I bought this house cheap, because folks say it’s haunted, my dear,” said Miss Pyphos, on introducing her niece to “The Firs,” her new home; “and I intend it to be haunted with the spirit of cheerfulness and goodwill—that’s you—and the spirit of reformation and experience—that’s me. We’ll see what wonders these ghosts shall work in concert, won’t we?”

When Mr. Ibbotson appeared again in public, he looked greyer and older, but he set about the discharge of his magisterial duties with much of the old self-confidence and pompous zeal. It was only on Sundays, when he sat at church in the corporation seat, with his eye fixed on a new marble monument opposite, on which the sculptor had lavished all the resources of his art, that his fellow-townsmen could see the change that had been wrought in him. There, in the seat of honour he had

so long coveted, he would sit and gaze at the white angel kneeling in prayer over his child's tomb, with a look that went to the beholder's heart.

Of Mr. Ibbotson's property at Wild's End various reports were soon afloat in the borough. Some persons averred that an insurrection of the tenants was imminent, and that Tyler the bricklayer, emulative of his historical namesake, Wat, was to head the rebel band that was to bring the tyrant to terms. Others opined that Mr. Ibbotson would yet turn reformer, and, by timely concessions, avert this catastrophe. But neither party was so supported by facts as that sagacious section of the community who affirmed that there had lately been an agent down from London, negotiating with Mr. Ibbotson for the purchase of the property on behalf of an enterprising capitalist with a taste for sanatory reform. That this demented person



owns no other name than "Pyphos" will scarcely surprise the reader.

Yes; pleasant visions of future usefulness and good rise before the old lady's eyes as she sits chatting with her niece by the fire-side at "The Firs," and Rachel enters into her aunt's schemes with the earnest enthusiasm of her nature. But she does not neglect her easel, and is promised a peep at the great galleries of Europe some day. Meanwhile she is working away at a subject suggested by Mr. Massingthorpe's curate, the last time they spent an evening at the vicarage. It is the first purely imaginative composition she had attempted. Perhaps that is why Mr. Bruce so often comes to help her with his advice. His taste in art has developed rapidly of late.

Little Miss Crewels thinks she shall lose her tenant ere long, and has lately taken to observing foreshadowings of some coming

event in the sediment of her teacup, the flight of magpies, or other signs of changes matrimonial. But then Miss Crewels has, in her time, indulged in other reading than that furnished at the Tract Repository, and holds perhaps somewhat imaginative views on the subject of Matrimony.

THE END OF THE FIRST NARRATIVE.

NARRATIVE II.—(A SEQUEL.)

JOHN JUXON.



## CHAPTER I.

## THE CLUB-ROOM ORATOR.

“TAP, tap, tap. Tick, tick, tick.” There they were, at it as usual—the watchmaker’s tiny hammers, and the clocks and watches, big and little, clicking away furiously all round the shop, as though Time itself would come to a standstill and universal confusion ensue if they relaxed their exertions for a single moment. In the calmness of this summer’s evening, Mr. Juxon’s clocks and watches seemed more importunate than usual. It was enough to make a man nervous to hear them recording the flight of Time in that remorseless fashion. But ere long the big

voice of the church-clock tolling out eight deep-toned strokes, seemed to strike them dumb with shame at their own puny efforts ; but they recovered themselves, as the last echoes died off in Church Lane, and were at work again as brisk as ever.

“ I’m afraid, John,” said a timid voice from the back of the shop, “ you are trying your eyes. Isn’t it time shop was shut up, my dear ? ”

The speaker had just opened the parlour-door, and stood meekly on the threshold.

“ You want to see my back turned on the house—eh, Mrs. Juxon ? Going to have a bit of supper with Miss Crewels, over the way, is that it ? ”

John Juxon, the watchmaker and optician of Church Lane, sitting by the shop-window with his magnifying-glass in his eye, and a dissected watch in his hand, gave an ironical chuckle ; but he never raised his head from

his work. He meant to close his shop just when it suited him, and not a moment before. But it was not for herself Mrs. Juxon was pleading, so she summoned up courage to add :

“ But it’s Saturday night, my dear ; and Mason wants to be going, I daresay.” She glanced at the watchmaker’s assistant (an intelligent-looking young man, also with magnifying-glass in eye and watch in hand) working away at the other window : “ It’s a beautiful night for a walk, John.”

Yes ; that was apparent even within the precincts of Church Lane. Though the little street was all in shadow, the last rays of the midsummer sun still shone on the pinnacles of the neighbouring tower, and the narrow stretch of blue between the house-tops was tinged with a golden gleam.

“ If he wants to be going, he can go,” replied John Juxon, curtly ; “ but I shan’t

leave my work undone. Fine weather or foul, it isn't my habit to do that, Mrs. Juxon !”

“ Nor mine, sir, for the matter of that, I think,” replied the young man, promptly, looking round him with a good-humoured smile.

“ Did I say it was ?” returned the watch-maker, tartly, still bending over his work, with his nose poking amongst the wheels and springs he was engaged in repairing. “ Did I say it was ? There's a French proverb, George Mason, that I happen to have come across in the course of my reading, that says, ‘ He who excuses himself accuses himself.’ When I charge you with neglecting work, it will be time for you to defend yourself and prove me a liar ; but don't try to disprove what you've never been accused of. As Mrs. Juxon recommends you to take an airing, you'd better put up work, I suppose.



I and the boy can shut up the shop, I've no doubt."

"There's no need for that, sir; I can wait till you've finished."

"Oh dear, no! Pray follow Mrs. Juxon's advice! Exercise is very healthful these fine evenings. Take the air, sir, by all means!"

The young man seemed accustomed to this satirical tone. He put by his tools, changed his working-coat for another that hung behind an inner door, and was about to leave the shop, when his master called him back, and said:

"If you like to take home that volume of the 'Penny Cyclopædia,' with the article on 'Optics' I was talking of, and try those experiments to-morrow, you'll find it on the top-shelf of the parlour book-case."

"I don't suppose I shall have time between this and Monday, sir—thank you all the same," said Mason.

“ Ah, beg your pardon ; forgot it’s against your principles to make experiments on Sundays. Teach the Sunday-school boys to repeat the Church Catechism, and get by heart the names of the stones in Aaron’s breastplate—eh ? That’s about it, isn’t it, Mason ? Hi, hi ! ” and John Juxon gave a chuckle that bespoke his contempt for his assistant’s tastes.

Mason only nodded a cheerful “ Good-night ” to his employer, as he took his departure ; while Mrs. Juxon, not caring for a *tête-à-tête* with her lord and master, retired to the parlour, leaving the watchmaker to his work as long as daylight lasted. Before half an hour the shop was shut up, and Mr. Juxon, putting his head into the parlour with his hat on, said :

“ I’m going on to ‘ The George.’ If Barnes calls, tell him he’ll find me in the club-room. Where’s Minnie ? ”

“Taking tea with Mrs. Dover, my dear.”

Mrs. Dover was a naval officer's widow, who lived at Tudor Cottage, Northgate—a pleasant old lady, with weak eyesight and a passion for novels; and three days a week Miss Minnie Juxon was engaged to read aloud to her.

“Always some excuse for gadding about,” muttered Mr. Juxon. “Pray, how is she to get home at this time of night?”

“I am going to fetch her myself, at nine,” replied the wife, meekly.

She did not add that somebody else was also going to fetch home her daughter, though Mrs. Juxon was quite aware of the fact, and had tried to expedite that somebody's departure from the shop in order to give him time to run home and make a becoming change in his dress before presenting himself in Northgate. Yes, George Mason and Minnie Juxon were engaged;

but this is a secret as yet, and must be kept such.

Mr. Juxon buttoned up his brown surtout, and strode down the lane, and across the marketplace, to his usual evening resort, the tradesmen's club-room at "The George." Returning the greeting of his neighbours with a short nod as he entered the room, he betook himself to the large armchair beside the fireplace—the seat of honour of the assembly. It belonged by prescriptive right and privilege to the oldest member of the club; and John Juxon, having smoked his pipe and drank his glass of gin-and-water in that room for thirty years, was such oldest member, and occupied it accordingly.

But without this distinctive testimony to his position in the club, it was easy to perceive that Mr. Juxon held an exceptional place amongst his old cronies.

There was a way of listening to his re-

marks, a deferential acceptance of his dicta, that showed it was more than mere seniority that had gained him his ascendancy in that assembly. John Juxon was acknowledged to be the first orator in the club, its acutest politician, its liveliest satirist—its chief authority, indeed, on all questions, social, political, or religious; and woe betide the unwary stranger who questioned the infallibility of this local pope!

But to-night Mr. Juxon was taking no part in the discussion that occupied the room. He sat with bent brows, puffing at his pipe in solemn silence, though an occasional grunt of dissent, or a half-suppressed “Pshaw!” showed he was listening attentively to the conversation around him. It referred to a subject that had lately excited considerable attention in Market Mudling, that of the management of the new schools at Wild’s End—a vexed and troubled ques-

tion, which bid fair to set all the town by the ears.

Some twelve months ago, our old friend Miss Pyphos had given over to the town a portion of land on her property at Wild's End, and the necessary funds to build and endow a school for the children in that once-neglected locality. The gift had of course been universally approved. Everybody applauded the lady's generosity, and everybody felt interested in a philanthropic scheme which would affect nobody's pocket, and which all were free to criticise as they pleased. The foundation-stone had been laid by Miss Pyphos herself, a year ago, and the building was now completed; but the difficulties of the enterprise were about to commence.

Miss Pyphos was abroad with her niece, with whom she had been spending a winter in Italy; but before leaving home, she had

made what she considered the necessary arrangements for the administration of the charity, by vesting it in six trustees, whom she had selected as representing the various shades of political and religious sentiment of the borough. Miss Pyphos imagined she was acting as became a liberal-minded, tolerant woman; but she little suspected what a hotbed of troubles she was preparing for those six unfortunate gentlemen.

A first meeting of the trustees had taken place, and upon all minor points the views of the assembly were nearly unanimous; but the great question of the religious instruction that was to be adopted—its nature, amount, and tendencies—was, as might be expected, a question bristling with difficulties. Mr. Massingthorpe, the vicar, was, of course, in favour of the Church Catechism, and orthodox Church of England teaching; Mr. Gregson, the iron-



monger, and member of the Methodist Connexion, was, as an equal matter of course, opposed to many clauses of the Catechism, though in favour of a sound Biblical theology; Mr. Barnes, the latitudinarian newspaper editor, was for simply cultivating the reasoning powers, and a knowledge of the four first rules of arithmetic; while Mr. Marfleet, the humanitarian bookseller, and chief apostle of progress in Market Mudling, advocated some impossible compromise, by which (to quote his own words) "all the more loveable features of Christian teaching could be retained without its narrow and exploded dogmas." As for Messrs. Burley and Smith, the mayor and bank-manager, they halted between their political sympathies with Dissenters and their social gentility. So the meeting had ended without any decision being arrived at; and this abortive result



was the subject under discussion in "The George" Club-room at this moment.

Now, when John Juxon had listened to the comments of his neighbours as long as his patience would allow, he bore down into the thick of the discussion with more than his usual animation.

"I'll tell you what it is, gentlemen!" said he, with fire in his eyes, "this is a more serious matter than some of you think. It's a question of freedom—religious freedom; and unless some of the inhabitants of this town are prepared to make a stand against the manœuvrings of the parsons, we shall have these schools become mere nursing-places of bigotry and superstition." (He paused a moment to take a sip of gin-and-water, and resumed with an energy that bespoke the sincerity of his convictions.) "Now, if I know anything of the intentions of the worthy lady

who founded these schools—a lady that every man in the borough is bound to respect for her handsome conduct and her noble liberality”—(this oratorically, after the manner of John Juxon when addressing the club)—“if I know anything, I say, of her intentions, she meant these schools to be places of rational instruction. Catechisms, indeed! What do the poor bairns want with your priestly jargon about sacraments and ‘outward and visible signs’? Let ’em learn to read, write, and cipher, and then take ’em into the green fields and shew ’em the bootercups and daisies, and the birds and insects, and they’ll learn more religion from the sight of God’s works than from all your catechisms!”

Mr. Juxon did not stop to explain how the process of instruction was to be carried out, by which the sight of these things was to tend to the spiritual education of

infant minds; but he seemed quite satisfied with the soundness of his view, and whether his hearers were so or not, they did not dispute it. So, after a few more puffs at his pipe, he resumed :

“I’ve read the report in the papers, and, to my mind, there isn’t one of the whole six who’s got good common-sense except Mr. Barnes. Marfleet’s views sound well in print, but has too much poetry and flummery about him, and you can’t combine antagonistics in that way.” (John Juxon liked a good long word, and coined one occasionally.) “No—no. Give ’em plain teaching, and don’t try and make bigots and fanatics in this age of free inquiry. That’s my view; and it was the founder’s too, I take it.”

“I’m not so sure of that, Mr. Juxon,” here interposed a grave-looking man, who hitherto had sat quietly smoking, and had

taken no part in the discussion. "If Miss Pyphos hadn't meant to give the Church party a voice, and a strong voice too, in the matter, why did she nominate three churchmen, and one of them a clergyman into the bargain?"

The remark of Mr. Dubbin, the currier, evidently made a sensation in the assembly.

"Why, sir?" retorted Mr. Juxon. "Do you ask me why? Because the parsons must have their say in these matters; because they're born busybodies, like the women, and will have a finger in every pie."

But this was an illogical and evasive reply, as Mr. Dubbin did not fail to remark; whereupon John Juxon, who knew as well as anyone that retorts were not arguments, felt his ire rise, and thrusting back his iron-grey hair with his thin hand, he said:

“Mr. Dubbin, you’re a churchman, and I’m not. I don’t want to hurt your feelings, or say anything against your *convictions*, for I’m a tolerant man, sir, and hate narrowmindedness; but this I’ll say and stick to, that there’s no set of men on the earth so interfering with their neighbours, so grasping for power, so keen after ‘the loaves and fishes,’ as the parsons!” And the club-room orator launched into a violent tirade against the clergy, making up by strength of invective what he wanted in force of argument.

“But I don’t see what ‘the loaves and fishes’ have got to do with it,” persisted the undaunted Dubbin.

“Don’t you, indeed, sir?” sneered Juxon, sarcastically; for he had but a poor opinion of the other’s reasoning powers, and, like Dr. Johnson, felt he could not be expected to find an opponent intellect as well as

arguments. "Why, won't the trustees appoint the schoolmasters and mistresses? Won't that give them influence, and isn't influence 'loaves and fishes,' or much the same thing? Do you suppose that any but church-folk's children will be allowed to attend the schools after a time, and won't the parsons entice poor folks to church in that way, and so get influence again?"

"Being a churchman myself, I don't see much harm in getting poor folks to come to church, if that's all you've got against the clergy, Mr. Juxon."

"Nor in *bribing* them to go, eh?" demanded Mr. Juxon, sternly. "Well, sir, I don't envy you your opinion, that's all. To my poor way of thinking, a man's religion should be the outcome of his own freewill and reason, not the mere dictation of a priest, be he of Rome or of Oxford. We've thrown off the priestly fetters of

the Past. The human intellect has outgrown 'em, sir, and man spurns them, as restrictions on the progress and development of the human race." (This was a passage from the 'True Church of Humanity,' a publication which John Juxon regarded as a new Gospel unto salvation.) "But here, sir, we get into a wide field, and I won't ask you to follow me further." And, in compassion to his weaker brother, the watchmaker dropped the discussion, stating that if any gentleman had anything to bring forward to show him he was wrong, he was open to conviction.

But there was silence in the room. No champion came forward to take up the glove Mr. Juxon had thrown down. Mr. Dubbin looked as though he were going to do so, and twice opened his mouth, but only smoke issued thence. Either he distrusted his own controversial powers, or

he thought silence the wiser part. So, once again, Mr. Juxon was left master of the field; and his supremacy, which Mr. Dubbin's bold attitude to-night had momentarily imperilled, was restored to him.

It was not out of consideration for his family, it is to be feared, that Mr. Juxon quitted the club-room earlier than usual to-night. A man who plays a prominent part in public affairs must, of course, cast domestic considerations to the winds. Instead of making his way home to Church Lane, as he was wont, Mr. Juxon, with head bent down and shoulders raised, after his habit when plunged in thought, walked slowly along towards Brown's Square, the only square in Market Mudling, and it had only three sides to it.

In Brown's Square dwelt Mr. Barnes, the editor of the *Market Mudling Sentinel*;



and being admitted to his presence, Mr. Juxon found his political friend, with a wet towel tied round his head and a tumbler of brandy-and-water by his side, engaged in his editorial duties.

“Can you spare me five minutes?” asked Mr. Juxon.

“Ten—but not a minute more,” replied the local Jupiter, coming down from the cloudy Olympus, where he was forging his editorial thunderbolts. “What is it?”

Mr. Juxon explained.

“Rather late—afraid we’ve not much space left. What is the letter to be about?”

“Ah! humph! That’s another thing. Of course we must manage it somehow,” continued Mr. Barnes, with a sly chuckle, as his visitor explained his object more fully. “Let me have it by eight o’clock to-morrow evening, and you shall see yourself in print on Monday morning, Mr.

Juxon. Good night ;” and they parted with amical smiles.

Now all the morrow, whilst the summer sun shone out on the green fields, and church-bells filled the air with pious clamour, John Juxon sat in the back-parlour behind his shop, indifferent to bells and sunshine, inditing the letter that was to “show up” the Church party, and expose the clerical machinations on foot in the matter of the Pyphos Charity.

## CHAPTER II.

## JOHN JUXON SOUNDS THE ALARM.

It may be conceived that Mrs. Juxon's matrimonial path in life had not been too plentifully sprinkled with roses. However gratifying it may be to be the wife of one of the foremost politicians in your native borough, there are drawbacks to that eminence, when looked at from a domestic point of view. Orators are sometimes a little dogmatic in private ; and the interests of one's own business are apt to suffer when one's best energies are devoted to settling the affairs of the State.

“How ever such a pretty gentle little woman as Mary Fleming could bring her-

self to marry such a queer contradictory person as Mr. Juxon—with good sense, I'll grant you, but no more manners than a bear," her good little neighbour, Miss Crewels, could never understand. But, then, Jane Crewels had always held and maintained that nothing in this world was so inscrutable as those mysterious affinities and attractions which led people to fall in love with one another and get married.

And it had been a genuine case of "falling in love," as Miss Crewels knew for a fact. For what but the magic spells of the blind boy could have induced Mary Fleming—"with five hundred pounds of her own, to say nothing of linen and silver, all thread-pattern, and without a dent upon it," as Miss Crewels parenthetically remarked)—what else but Love could have induced her to bestow her hand upon Mr. John Juxon? When they married, he was only a journey-

man watchmaker, and a comparatively obscure person, having come to the town a few years before with all his property in the carpet-bag he carried on his back—a strange young man, with a tinge of mystery about him ! “ Truly Love worked miracles, when he found favour in Miss Fleming’s eyes,” reflected Miss Crewels.

By the aid of his wife’s money, and by his own industry and talent, Mr. Juxon had done well in business ; and it was often said in Market Mudling, that but for his proneness to meddle in politics, and awkward temper, John Juxon might have “ kept his carriage ” years ago.

There was probably “ poetical license ” in this phrase ; but, unquestionably, Mr. Juxon’s earnings had been large at one time, though they had not gone on increasing. At the time when George Mason became his assistant, some three years ago, the business

was at a very low ebb. Since then it had revived; and no one knew better than Mr. Juxon that it was mainly owing to the talent and good manners of his assistant that this revival had come about, though, of course, he would not have owned so much on any account.

But Mrs. Juxon was perfectly aware of it; and when she discovered, a few weeks ago, that Mason was in love with her daughter, she was by no means ill-pleased.

“A steadier, more deserving young man was not to be found in the town,” said she to her old friend Miss Crewels.

“Nor a handsomer, to my mind!” replied Miss Crewels, with enthusiasm; and she warmly congratulated the mother, and drew a charming picture of a partnership between Mr. Juxon and his son-in-law, with the joint names in gold letters over the shop-front.

But Mrs. Juxon did not take quite so san-

guine a view. She was by no means sure how her husband would regard the matter. "He's odd, you know, Jane, and I'm doubtful whether he'll take to it at first," said Mrs. Juxon, shaking her head. And Mrs. Juxon had gone on doubting and shaking her head up to the present time, and had never found courage to tell her husband of the engagement. Mason wanted to do so on the outset, but Mrs. Juxon had begged him to wait awhile. "He'll take it better from me, I think," said the poor woman, in a voice that betrayed her fears, "and I am only waiting for a nice opportunity." But the opportunity had never presented itself; and Mrs. Juxon's secret lay heavy on her conscience, and was wearing out her life.

On the Monday morning the *Market Mudling Sentinel* made its appearance, with Mr. Juxon's letter to the editor, signed "Judex"—(what name more appropriate for

a writer of such a calm judicial cast of mind!)—in a prominent place and fair type. It was a bold letter, and sounded the first note of an alarm that was meant to rouse up the public from its apathy.

It contained the usual “Now, sir, I wish to know,” and “Again I ask,” of indignant newspaper correspondents, and was of the average virulence of such compositions. It was intended as a protest against the abortive meeting of the charity trustees, but was in reality an attack on the clergy in general, and Mr. Massingthorpe in particular. More than one acute reader recognised the trenchant style of the radical watchmaker of Church Lane, and of course everyone read it with the gusto with which folks do read newspaper attacks on their fellow-townsmen. By ten o’clock it had made its way to every subscriber’s hands, and by noon it had got the ear of the whole town.



Church Lane was quite in a flutter about it. Miss Crewels ran across with the newspaper to Mr. Dipp, as early as nine o'clock, with two stray curl-papers still adorning her head; Mr. Dipp carried it over to Mr. Hackett, the butcher, and discussed it with him over the chopping-block; and old Mrs. Coffey, who kept the eating-house and bun-shop at the corner, read it half-a-dozen times, and could "make neither head nor tail of it," as she said. Some cute folks sniggered, and cast dark glances at the watchmaker's shop; feeling that, if their suspicions were correct, John Juxon was a remarkable man, and the "Lane" ought to be proud of him.

Miss Crewels was so "behindhand" this morning, as she said, that when a pony-phæton drew up at her door the shop-window was not "dressed," nor the forgotten curl-papers removed. Well might the little woman smuggle the copy of *The*

*Sentinel* under the counter with such precipitation ! The early customer was no other than Mrs. Massingthorpe.

“She must have seen it in my hands. How hurtful to her feelings !” thought Miss Crewels, with confusion.

But Mrs. Massingthorpe was as ignorant of the contents of the newspaper as the flies in the shop-window. *The Sentinel* still lay unopened on the hall-table at home, and the good lady as yet knew nothing of the dreadful bomb that had been fired at the Vicarage from Church Lane.

“Now, Miss Crewels, I have a little secret for you,” began the Vicar’s wife, “and I want a little of your advice.”

“Good heavens ! she is going to tell me that her husband intends to bring an action for libel !” reasoned Miss Crewels, quite trembling with agitation ; and she replied, solemnly : “Mrs. Massingthorpe, you may

rely on my not breathing a word about it to a soul !”

“ Wait till you know my secret, my good little woman, for it will be a sore temptation,” replied Mrs. Massingthorpe, smiling at this solemnity ; and the Vicar’s wife proceeded to inform her hearer that her eldest daughter’s marriage-day was fixed for the 30th of the month, and that in consequence of the wedding taking place earlier than was expected (as she was going out to India with her husband), there was difficulty about the bridal preparation.

“ Now I want to know, Miss Crewels, whether you have got the rest of the lace mended I sent you ; and, secondly, whether the young person who has done it and the embroidered handkerchiefs so beautifully, will come and give a helping hand at the Vicarage for a few days ?”

Was anything ever more embarrassing for

an obliging, peace-loving little woman like Miss Crewels? “*The young person*” was Miss Juxon, for whom Miss Crewels had often privately obtained needlework. But how, in the present juncture, could she be admitted at the Vicarage?

Miss Crewels hesitated and stammered, and finally said: “I fear it can’t be done, ma’am. Though a most respectable family, the Juxons are not—not exactly of the same way of thinking as ourselves, you know, ma’am; and though it would ill become me to say a word against a neighbour, still Mr. Juxon has views on—on—sacred subjects that——”

“My good creature!” interrupted Mrs. Masingthorpe, “you surely don’t mean to say that Miss Juxon would refuse me a little neighbourly assistance because her father, poor man! is not a churchgoer? Come, come—I know we are not too liberal at Market

Mudling, but I don't think we're so bad as that;" and Mrs. Massingthorpe announced her intention of going over the way, to call upon Miss Juxon herself. "I shall use your name as my introduction, and make the lace-mending my excuse," said the old lady, as she trotted off, leaving Miss Crewels in a state of consternation.

It was a fortunate circumstance that Mr. Juxon had just gone over to "The George" for his "eleven-o'clock glass of beer," and so his wife was able to receive her visitor in the parlour without fear of interruption. Mrs. Juxon was much embarrassed and a little frightened at the sight of her visitor—not that she knew anything about "Judex's" letter, but she fancied the vicar's wife must regard her as a renegade from the faith; for the Flemings had always been good orthodox church-folks, and it had been a great trouble to her when her husband (now long ago)

had refused to allow her to set foot in the parish church. As a concession to weak minds, Mr. Juxon allowed his wife and daughter to attend the Baptist Chapel—not from any preference for the doctrines taught there, but from his political sympathy with Dissenters.

But good Mrs. Massingthorpe was not the sort of person to inspire much awe, and her pleasant manner soon put Mrs. Juxon at her ease. More than that, Minnie Juxon was so charmed with the old lady, that when she heard she could do her a favour, she rashly consented. But Mrs. Juxon looked uneasy when she heard what the favour was, and thought it better that the work should be done at home.

“As you like about that, Mrs. Juxon. Of course I am aware that your daughter does not make a practice of going out as a needlewoman. She is much too pretty-man-

nered and nicely-educated. I know all about her from Mrs. Dover. You're a great favourite of hers, my dear," said the old lady, patting Minnie's cheek; "and I didn't know until to-day that her little friend and my clever lace-mender were one and the same person."

Minnie blushed prettily at these praises, and asked Mrs. Massingthorpe if she would like to take home the rest of the lace. "I put it here, between the leaves of one of the big books, to press and straighten, and be out of harm's way. It is fine as a cobweb."

"Ah, they don't make such nowadays, Miss Juxon," said Mrs. Massingthorpe, as Minnie unlocked her father's bookcase. "That lace has been worn in three generations of my family for bridal trimmings, and I wish my daughter to wear it on her wedding-day. May I take it in the book, just as it is? It won't bear much fingering."

The lace had been placed in a musty calf-bound volume, which Minnie had chosen as the heaviest and biggest in the bookcase. 'Paley's Natural Theology' was the title on the back. It had not been opened for years until the other day; and so Minnie, feeling sure that her father, particular as he was about his books, would neither want nor miss it, handed it to Mrs. Massingthorpe, who departed with her treasure safe in its leaves.

But little did Minnie Juxon know that that musty brown volume was to prove a veritable Book of Fate. Little did she suspect the terrible mistake she was making. Her father would have sooner parted with all the stock in his shop than let that volume go out of his house for a single hour!



## CHAPTER III.

## A VOLUME OF PALEY.

It was not until the day's duties were over and dinner ended that Mr. Massingthorpe opened the copy of the *Sentinel* which contained so pleasant a surprise for him. The ladies had retired to the drawing-room, and the vicar, sipping his port-wine, had promised himself a quiet doze over the local news-sheet, when his eye fell on the startling letter of "Judex."

"Who could this irate correspondent be, who thus took him and his brethren to task?" wondered Mr. Massingthorpe, nettled at the writer's tone. "Judex! Who wrote under that modest signature? Somebody

probably whose name began with a J," and he began to think over his parishioners' names.

"It couldn't be Jewson, the chemist, for he was a staunch churchman. It wasn't Jarver, the schoolmaster, for his style, though less forcible, would have been more tinctured with grammar. Nor was it likely to be Jorbury, the solicitor, for he was clerk to the charity trustees." The Vicar turned it over until the servant summoned him to tea, when he entered the drawing-room with his benevolent forehead puckered into a frown. Mrs. Massingthorpe was at that moment relating to her daughters her successful visit of the morning, and the words on her lips were :

"And her name is Juxon, my dears, and a very well-behaved young woman she is."

"Juxon!" reflected the vicar; "why, of course, that's the man. John Juxon, the

radical watchmaker, of Church Lane ; how came I never to think of him before ?”

Mr. Massingthorpe was so much startled at the discovery that he paid less attention to the discussion on his daughter’s wedding-dress than perhaps the subject merited. But he would not spoil the ladies’ pleasure by drawing their attention to the disagreeable letter in the *Sentinel*, though it occupied his thoughts all the evening.

Now the vicar of Market Mudling had lived on peaceable terms with his neighbours for years past, and had made a point of never mixing himself up with local politics or public matters of any sort when he could avoid it. He was not a very active-minded man—did not shepherd up his sheep with the zeal of some pastors, whose crook is always catching at the legs of straying members of the flock. He preached sermons neither remarkable for eloquence nor logic

(detractors like John Juxon openly sneered at them, in fact), but he set his parishioners an example of gentleness and charity, had always a courteous word for his neighbours, and was ever ready to head a subscription list to the full extent of his means.

“ Mere moralities, these ! ” sighed Mrs. Garway, the wife of the incumbent of St. Mary’s, with a shake of her head ; but at any rate qualities that make a clergyman liked, and not unbecoming in any man.

So Mr. Massingthorpe was vexed at this newspaper controversy, which he certainly had not provoked, and he resolved to write a strong letter to the editor that same night, after his family had retired. But when the letter was written, and the vicar had taken up a book to calm himself before going to bed (for the matter had put him out), he did not feel quite satisfied with what he had done. There were reasons, known only to

himself, why he would rather have had a contest with any man in the town sooner than with Mr. Juxon.

“Silence will be the wiser part,” said the old gentleman, as he tore up the letter.” “My character will stand the attacks of a newspaper correspondent, I think;” and he felt quite relieved when he had seen the last spark die out of the burnt paper on the hearth.

He took up his book again and set himself to read. He had taken the first volume that came to hand, which chanced to be the brown old Paley that his wife had left there on the table. There was nothing in the volume itself to arrest Mr. Massingthorpe’s attention—its contents were familiar enough to him, of course; but he had not held it five minutes before he became deeply absorbed in it. Certain marginal notes in pencil had riveted his attention. He turned

to the flyleaf. There was no owner's name, for the top of the page had been cut off; but below in writing, familiar enough to him, were the words "Trin. Coll., Camb. 1804," with a caricature of a learned professor spouting Greek.

"Extraordinary!" murmured Mr. Massingthorpe. "I could swear to Frank Carrington's writing. How did the book get here?"

Then he recalled the story of the lace, to which he had paid so little heed, and his wife's visit to Church Lane. He leaned back in his chair—with a whole train of long-past events passing through his mind. One by one he recalled them all, until the appearance of the book on his own table gradually explained itself.

"Strange, that it should fall into my hands to-night," pondered the Vicar, gravely. "If I wanted confirmation of that sad history, I should find it here."

And as his eye caught sight again of the burnt letter on the hearth, Mr. Massingthorpe felt more relieved than ever that he had destroyed it.

## CHAPTER IV.

## JUDEX VERSUS FAIRPLAY.

It is quite certain that the warmest of Mr. Juxon's admirers did not believe more thoroughly in his integrity than he believed in it himself. "Honest John Juxon" was the name he had won for himself in the borough; and it was a name he was proud of, and to which he was not without title. On several occasions he had given proofs of an independence and disinterestedness in his public conduct by no means common in Market Mudling, where political virtue was certainly its own reward, having no market value to speak of. And yet, the unwilling



historian is compelled to admit that this frank outspoken man carried a secret in his bosom which he would not have revealed for the wealth of the empire—a secret which not even his wife remotely suspected, and which his fellow-townsmen would have refused to believe, if proclaimed at the town cross by the public crier. What is, perhaps, more remarkable, is that Mr. Juxon himself almost discredited his own secret nowadays; at least it had ceased to trouble him, or even recur to him, except at rare intervals. In the course of a long life men outlive even their bitterest recollections, grow almost into other men, and can look with a curious dispassionateness and unconcern on frailties of half-a-century ago. And if, as in John Juxon's case, a complete disruption has occurred between that far-off past and the present, it requires an effort of imagination as well as of memory to reconstruct a time

which, save in rare moments, is as though it had never been.

Now, though the borough of Market Mudling enjoyed its local squabbles and scandals as much as any town in the kingdom, the question at issue amongst the trustees of the Pyphos Charity would hardly have furnished matter for any lengthy newspaper controversy, but for a new person's interference. Having made up his mind to take no notice of the irascible "Judex," Mr. Massingthorpe expected there would be an end of the affair, in print at least. But not so. A few days after, there appeared in the *Market Mudling Guardian* (the opposition and Conservative newspaper) a letter in defence of the vicar. Some zealous friend of the Church had resolved to break a lance in the cause of Orthodoxy, and administer a castigation to the merciless "Judex." This well-meaning individual, who wrote a very

tolerable letter, signed himself "Fairplay;" but his actual cognomen was a mystery to all. Mr. Massingthorpe felt much obliged to his defender, but heartily wished the gentleman had *not* felt himself called upon to play the part of champion. This sort of notoriety was just what Mr. Massingthorpe most disliked. However, he trusted the matter would go no further. After this sharp rap from "Fairplay," Mr. Juxon would probably be disinclined for a continuance of hostilities, and mind his own business.

Not he, forsooth! Mr. Massingthorpe little knew his man if he thought he was to be thus silenced. John Juxon prided himself on being one of the few who care more for truth than for trade, for principle than for pocket. In a matter of conscience (and of course this was such) Mr. Juxon would fight to the last. What though his private interests suffered if the public welfare

gained? Girding on his armour again, John Juxon descended into the arena valiant as ever, and came out with a thundering letter in the next issue of the *Sentinel*, which excited immense sensation in the borough. "Fairplay" answered back with undaunted mien, and the two champions, now thoroughly roused, did battle in the newspaper columns for the next two or three weeks.

When Mrs. Juxon discovered what took her husband so much from home just now (for he was constantly in consultation with Barnes and other political friends), she shed tears in Miss Crewels's back-parlour, and said she was indeed an unhappy woman.

"It will be the ruin of the business, I know," she sighed, "now John has taken to newspaper writing again. Last General Election was as good as fifty pounds out of our pockets; for you know what party feeling there always is in the town; and I can

assure you, Miss Crewels, that the pinks would not bring even a watch to regulate or a brooch to repair for months and months after, though you know as well as me that the work can't be equalled elsewhere. I wish that nasty fellow, 'Fairplay,' had kept his mouth shut, I'm sure; John can't bear contradiction."

"But you see, it was Mr. Juxon began it," said Miss Crewels, who could not allow the defender of the Church to be ill-spoken of, and who, indeed, greatly admired "Fairplay's" letters.

"What a curious thing it is," went on the little shopkeeper, "nobody knows who he is—'Fairplay,' I mean! I taxed Mr. Bruce with it this morning, but he said, 'Pray don't spread any such report, Miss Crewels,' and seemed almost vexed, though really the letters are so beautifully worded, they quite remind me of his sermons."

But the subject could not be other than painful to her listener, so Miss Crewels turned the conversation by inquiring how matters were going on between the lovers. At this inquiry Mrs. Juxon's face grew more doleful than before.

"There's something wrong between them. I can't make Mason out. He's not been at all himself the last few days."

"Not words, I hope?" asked Miss Crewels, in a sympathetic tone.

"No," replied her friend, "and I wouldn't like to say coldness; but Mason has something on his mind, I'm sure;" and Mrs. Juxon proceeded to state that there was a taciturnity and gloominess about young Mason which she could not at all understand.

Some one else had noticed the moody preoccupied air of George Mason the last few days; and this some one was now sitting listening to the apprentice putting up

the shop-shutters, as she plied her needle by the parlour-window in a state of anxious expectation. Minnie Juxon hummed a cheerful air to herself, though her heart was heavy within her. For two days past George Mason had hardly spoken to her, and had worn such a grave and anxious face that she longed to ask him what was amiss. "Will he look into the parlour to-night?" she wondered. She hummed more gaily than before, but the tears almost choked her singing as she heard him lock up the shop, put on his coat, and bid the apprentice "Good night." "He was going away again without a word. What had come to him?"

But when the apprentice had departed, there was a little pause, and then came a tap at the parlour-door, and Mason entered.

"I want to have a few words with you, Minnie," said he. "I am glad you are alone;" and he added, uneasily, "I m afraid



you don't at all suspect what I'm going to tell you?"

"No," said Minnie, surprised and almost alarmed at his serious air.

"It's an awkward business," began Mason, with embarrassment, "and, of course, I'm annoyed about it; but still I don't see that I'm to blame. You know of your father's letters to the *Sentinel*, I suppose?"

"Yes; but you can no more prevent them than I can, George," said Minnie.

"I couldn't prevent him writing in the first place; but I might have put a stop to the correspondence all the same."

"How could you have done that?"

"By not answering him," said the young man, slowly, averting his eyes as he spoke.

"Not answering him? Oh, George, you don't—you don't mean to say that——?"

"That I'm 'Fairplay'?" he added, for she had turned so pale and looked so frightened



that she seemed unable to finish. "Yes, I do. I am the writer of the letters that have given your father such offence, and I think you ought to know it."

There was silence for some moments; and then Minnie said, warmly:

"You have acted unfairly, George, and deceitfully, and I shall never——"

"Think as well of me again, I suppose?" put in Mason. "Why, you don't suppose that I knew who 'Judex' was when I first replied to him? You don't suppose I'm such a sneak as to take your father's money every week, and then sit down and write him anonymous letters in the papers? I only knew three days ago who it was I was replying to, and you may fancy I've not felt very comfortable since."

Mason spoke impatiently—almost aggrievedly, and Minnie replied:

"I hardly know what I thought just

now, I am so unhappy at what you have told me. But I didn't mean to hurt your feelings; and if I was too hasty, I'm sorry for it. But oh, George, what *will* father say when he finds it out?"

Minnie had laid down her work and looked so utterly wretched, that Mason felt strongly tempted to go up to her and kiss her on the spot. But it behoved him to be circumspect in this delicate position of matters.

"Your father will be very angry, and will perhaps dismiss me," said the young man, sorrowfully. "Ah, Minnie, your mother meant us well, but it was a mistake our not telling him of our engagement at first. I don't see how it can be done now."

"Oh, no!" said Minnie, shaking her head. "Father is so hasty, and he is so bitter against 'Fairplay,' that I think he would like to——"

But she didn't say what her father would like to do to his opponent. She added :

“ But can't something be done in the papers, or some way, to make matters up with him ? ”

George Mason shook his head and frowned. “ You wouldn't have me eat my own words ? ” said he. “ I have gone further than I meant in the matter ; but I've not said a single thing I'm ashamed of. If I'd known ‘ Judex ’ was your father, I shouldn't have written at all, as I tell you ; but because he *is* your father, you wouldn't have me withdraw what I wrote honestly and in good faith, would you ? ”

“ Oh, George, don't speak like that ! ” said Minnie with an unsteady voice.

“ You seem to forget, Minnie,” said he, approaching nearer to her, but speaking in the same aggrieved way, “ that my position

is a very hard one. You must remember that a man has his own convictions, and shouldn't be afraid to speak them out."

He had drawn so near her now, that his hand was on the back of her chair.

"If you still think I did wrong though, I can't help it," he went on, noticing how silently she sat, and feeling vexed at it. "There are times when it's a man's duty to speak his mind, and I felt it to be mine when I saw Mr. Massingthorpe unjustly attacked. But if what I have done is to make a difference between you and me, why, we—we had better in future—that is, I mean——"

George Mason hardly knew what he meant, and stopped short, looking flushed and miserable. But Minnie could play this game as well as he.

"Just as you please about the future," said she, in an altered voice, and she took up

her needle and stitched away as well as her trembling fingers would let her.

They had never been so near a quarrel in their lives. Mason retreated a step, and with folded arms leaned back against the wall, and looked down on his sweetheart with knitted brows. But the face he gazed at was too sad and too sweet a face to provoke to wrath.

“Minnie,” said he, more gently, “have you made up your mind, then, not to forgive me?”

“I—I never said so, George!”

“But you are terribly displeased,” said he.

“I can’t help feeling unhappy, and—and you took me up so sharply;” and then such a pitiful little tear trickled down Minnie Juxon’s cheek that George Mason could bear it no longer, and stooping over her chair—but the rest of the episode may be divined. It was all made up again.

Now, George Mason ought to have taken

his departure at this point, as he intended ; but it was so pleasant to linger by Minnie's side, and the renewal of love was so sweet after the little quarrel that had preceded it, that when the clocks in the shop began to strike nine, one after another, Mason still stood there by Minnie's chair ; and they were chatting away so happily that they never heard the private door of the house open, nor knew that Mr. Juxon had unexpectedly returned home. He had left his spectacles behind him, and his voice, calling for his daughter to run and look for them, made them both start.

“ You're lively here to-night,” said the watchmaker, opening the parlour-door. “ May I ask the joke ? ”

He was the last man to suspect the true state of things. Like other domestic tyrants, he fancied he had the same control over people's inner as over their outward lives ;

and the idea of his daughter presuming to fall in love without his permission had never entered his head. Mason had so often worked over-hours of late, that he was not surprised to find him there with the keys of the shop in his hand; and he began to talk to his assistant about the business with unusual affability.

“ You know, Mason, I couldn’t give up my time to public matters as I do, if I hadn’t confidence in you,” said he, with a good-humoured air; “ but I expect I shall have more time for my own business directly. I’ve got something here that I think will about demolish the gentleman I have in hand.” Mr. Juxon gave a dry chuckle, and held up a letter to Mason’s view. “ I suppose you know (for it’s no secret in the town now) who ‘ Judex ’ is—eh? Of course you’ve read the correspondence between him and ‘ Fairplay ’ ?”

Mason made some scarcely audible reply. He had turned crimson, but the twilight hid his embarrassment.

“I’ve got something here that will take the conceit out of Mr. ‘Fairplay,’ I fancy. Dummy, you know, set up by the Church party. Shouldn’t wonder but old Massingthorpe writes the letters himself; but I’ll expose them—I’ll expose them!” and Mr. Juxon chuckled again.

Now, one minute before, Mason had made up his mind that he would tell Mr. Juxon then and there of his engagement to his daughter. He felt there was something dishonourable in this concealment, and it vexed him that he and Minnie should have to act in this guilty way, and hide feelings of which they had no reason to be ashamed. But his temper was roused by this speech, and he replied, incautiously :

“‘Fairplay’ has a mind of his own, like



other folks, I suppose. Mr. Massingthorpe has something else to do than write letters to the papers, I expect."

Mr. Juxon looked surprised at this warmth of tone.

"Ah," said he, "I needn't discuss the matter with you. You always defend the parsons through thick and thin, and are blind—stone-blind—on some points. You're a good judge, Mason, of the works of a watch, but no judge of the actions and motives of men."

"I don't set up to be; but Mr. Massingthorpe was a good friend to my mother when she was left a widow, and I hope I shall always stand up for him. Whether 'Fair-play' is a fool or not is a question that——"

But Mason stopped; Minnie had just returned with the spectacles, and the revelation that would have escaped him the next moment died away on his lips.

“Go on, sir—you’re getting eloquent,” said Mr. Juxon, with sarcasm in his voice.

“No, sir, I’m taking up your time,” said Mason, and, swallowing down his wrath, he bade them a hasty “Good night,” and vanished.

“I tell you what it is, that young fellow is getting conceited, and too fond of argument,” said Mr. Juxon to his daughter. “He is a clever workman, but he mustn’t fancy that because I trust him as I do that I couldn’t manage my business without him.”

Minnie said not a word, though she had twenty at her tongue’s end. But when her father had gone again, the poor girl sat down and burst into a flood of tears, and felt more thoroughly miserable than she had ever done in her life.

## CHAPTER V.

## A WRATHFUL MAN.

GEORGE MASON felt his position to be embarrassing enough. Whether to make a clean breast of it, and avow to Mr. Juxon the authorship of the letters that so irritated him—whether to let the correspondence die out, or whether to continue it boldly without reference to private considerations, were questions that much troubled his peace of mind. It would look like cowardice, or an admission of wrongdoing, to retire from the contest, and yet by continuing it he was seriously damaging his own prospects. Though a generous warm-hearted fellow, Mason had some of his master's obstinacy of

character. He had felt piqued, too, at the contemptuous tone in which Mr. Juxon had spoken of "Fairplay," and naturally felt irritated at that threat of demolishment. If "Judex's" next letter demanded a reply, as he felt sure it would, Mason resolved that it was his duty to give that reply at all costs.

Meanwhile, Mr. Massingthorpe still preserved the silence which he had imposed upon himself, though not without his reticence provoking comments in the town. Even his wife was of opinion that her husband carried his forbearance too far.

"There are limits to the tolerance required in a clergyman, my dear," said she, "and this 'Judex' wants really putting down for his attacks on the Church of England and its ministers. I call it wicked, and demoralising to the town—I do, indeed," and the good old lady's mild eyes sparkled with indignation as she put down the copy of the

*Sentinel* she had just been reading at breakfast.

“I think I’ll leave him and Mr. ‘Fairplay’ to fight it out,” says the vicar, smiling at his wife’s excitement. “I have got a zealous champion enough, though he might be a little stronger in his grammar. It’s an odd thing I can’t find out who ‘Fairplay’ is.”

Secrets of this sort are hard to keep in provincial towns, and though Mason had done his best to guard the anonymous, it was oozing out here and there that Mr. Juxon’s spirited adversary was no other than his own shop-assistant. It can be imagined what wonder and amusement this discovery was calculated to provoke.

The next few days were very miserable ones for Minnie Juxon. She dare not tell the secret her lover had entrusted to her, even to her mother. She kept as much out of Mason’s way as possible, and hardly spoke

when they met. He was hurt at this; but she knew that in the present critical state of matters it was the wisest course. She had small sympathy with "Judex's" views, but she felt it would be unnatural in her as a daughter to show any approval of those of "Fairplay." The more George Mason felt hurt at this coldness, the more he resolved that it was his duty not to be tempted by private feelings to lay down his arms, and retire from the cause he had been fighting for. The only satisfaction he could find just now was in giving an amount of attention and assiduity to his master's business that could leave no cause for censure in that quarter.

But the treacherous peace that reigned in the watchmaker's family was about to be rudely broken ere long.

It was market-day, and the town was in the usual state of activity produced by the weekly advent of farmers' gigs, carts and waggons,

and droves of big oxen, which sometimes got astray in Church Lane, and imperilled the shop-windows with their horns, and frightened Miss Crewels almost to death. Everybody was busy, and supposed to be “turning over money” in the way of trade. But John Juxon was not behind his counter, like more prudent tradesmen. He was gossiping in Mr. Etherley’s, the corn and coal dealer’s office — a favourite lounge with local politicians, and headquarters of news.

“Well, Juxon, you’re generally ’cute enough. I wonder you never smelt a rat before,” says Jennings, the veterinary surgeon, splitting a grain of corn between his teeth. “I tell you he’s the man, as sure as you’re there.”

“I don’t believe it, sir,” says Juxon, turning almost fiercely upon the speaker. “A pack of nonsense!”

Mr. Juxon had just heard something which did seem quite incredible to him.

“Whether you believe it or not, it’s been talked of pretty generally the last few days,” says Mr. Etherley. “You see what it says in this morning’s *Guardian*—‘It may be well to drop a discussion which has gone further than was originally intended.’ That looks as though Mr. ‘Fairplay’ was beginning to draw in his horns, now the thing is getting wind in the town. A shabby get-out, though, I must say.”

Mr. Juxon read the sentences pointed out by Mr. Etherley, and a new light was thrown thereon by what he had just heard. Was it possible that——? But the mere supposition was too much for Mr. Juxon’s patience.

“Pshaw! It’s out of all reason!” he exclaimed, pushing aside the paper impatiently. “Mason knows better than to



try that game with me. It's more than his berth is worth. Good morning, gentlemen. I leave you to enjoy your joke. I can't stand gossiping here all day;" and Mr. Juxon turned away so abruptly that his friends looked and laughed significantly at each other.

Yes, Mr. Juxon had gone off "with a flea in his ear," as Mr. Jennings forcibly but inelegantly expressed it. He was so put out that he made a little *détour* before entering his own shop, and walked half way down the High-street to calm himself. Just opposite Mr. Ibbotson's premises a neighbour tapped him on the shoulder. It was Mr. Moggs, with his neatly-folded umbrella in one hand, and in the other a basket of vegetables he had just been cheapening in the market.

"Can I have a word with you, Juxon?" he whispered. "It isn't a pleasant matter,

and I'm the last man to busy myself in my neighbour's concerns; but I think, as a friend, I ought to put you—put you on your guard, you know.”

Little Mr. Moggs was always deferential, but he was obsequious to Mr. Juxon, having more than once experienced the force of his powers of satire in the club-room and elsewhere.

“What is it, sir?” asked the watchmaker.

“A private matter, Mr. Juxon—I might say a domestic matter;” and then Mr. Moggs got confused, for he did not know how Mr. Juxon would brook any interference with his domestic concerns, and he went off into mysterious allusions to “snakes in the grass,” “serpents at the hearth,” &c.

Mr. Juxon smiled contemptuously. “I’ve no serpents at my hearth, sir,” said he. “What d’ye mean?”

“Let us hope not, Mr. Juxon ; but I think I ought to tell you what I have seen with my own eyes.”

And the retired auctioneer began to relate how, some evenings ago, he had seen George Mason and Miss Juxon walking together, “quite like lovers,” and how he was afraid the young man was trying to steal the affections of his master’s daughter. Mr. Moggs did not relate how Mrs. Juxon was only a few yards in the rear of them, or how he himself had listened to their conversation, hidden behind his own garden-hedge, but he said enough to have irritated his hearer greatly at any other time. But Mr. Juxon was relieved at this moment to find that it was not a repetition of the other absurd story, and replied :

“Ah ! so that’s all, is it, Moggs ? I’d advise you to keep these tales to yourself. I’ve confidence enough both in my daughter

and in Mason not to feel uneasy, even if matters were as you say; but that's not very likely, seeing that I'm master in my own house, and know pretty well what goes on there, and without other folks troubling themselves about my affairs, too."

With which rebuff Mr. Juxon passed on again.

He was not accustomed to have his family affairs made the subject of neighbours' comment; and though he placed no credit in Mr. Moggs's insinuations, he was annoyed that there should have been any possible ground for them, and so resolved to read his daughter a little lecture on the first opportunity. But he had a matter on his mind just now of far greater importance than this silly gossip; and as he hastened home, he resolved to take prompt action thereon.

There were customers in the shop when he entered it, so he merely said to his assistant,

“When you have done there I want to speak to you, Mr. Mason;” and he strode into the parlour, where his daughter was busy with some of Miss Massingthorpe’s marriage garments before her. Mr. Juxon impatiently pushed the finery away, to make a clear space on the table, and pulling out a square packet, tied with string, from his breast-pocket, said, “Leave the room, Minnie. I have business with Mason. Stay,” he continued, the next moment; “perhaps you had better remain where you are, I may have a word to say to you presently.”

There was something so ominous in her father’s voice that Minnie changed colour instantly. “What is it, father?” she asked.

“You’ll know shortly,” he replied, untying the string that confined the packet, and disclosing to view a bundle of newspapers. Then Minnie knew what was

coming, and her heart turned cold within her.

By the time Mr. Juxon had picked out the papers he wanted, Mason entered.

“You wanted me, sir?” asked the young man, and with so little suspicion of what he was wanted for, that he added, “I mustn’t be away more than two minutes;” for it was a busy hour of the day, and there was only the apprentice in the shop.

“That depends,” said Mr. Juxon, drily. “Please to close that door.”

As he did so, Mason’s eye fell on the newspapers. He changed colour immediately. But he looked at Minnie the next moment, as much as to bid her take courage, and he advanced a little nearer the table, though with a beating heart.

“George Mason,” said Mr. Juxon, fixing his assistant with his keen gray eyes, “I’ve known you, man and boy, for fifteen years,

and I've never known you to tell a lie. I want a straightforward answer to the question I'm going to put to you. Do you know anything——?" Mr. Juxon stopped; the enormity of the offence was such that his voice failed him at the mention of it: "Do you know anything of the writer of that letter in the *Guardian*?" He handed one of the offending epistles to him as he spoke.

"Yes, sir, I do."

Mason's voice was unsteady also, but he did not shrink before his master's gaze.

"Then you mean to say," began Mr. Juxon, slowly, with his eyes riveted on him—"You — mean — to — say that — you wrote them?"

At that moment, even Mr. Juxon could not believe that an affirmative reply would come.

"I did, sir; but I must explain that

when I began the correspondence I was not aware——”

“Stop!” cried Mr. Juxon, rising from his seat. “I want no explanations. You’re a scoundrel, and you’re a liar! You’re a scoundrel for daring to hold up me, your master, to ridicule in a public print; and you’re a liar for keeping this a secret, and coming here every day with fair words in your mouth! Now you know my opinion of you.”

These were strong words, and almost more than Mason could endure; but Minnie stood there, white and trembling, and he restrained himself.

“It’s an unjust opinion, Mr. Juxon; but, as you say you won’t listen to my explanations, I don’t suppose I can change it—for the present, at least. I never intended to give any personal offence to you, but merely tried to defend a cause that I thought was unjustly attacked.”



“ ‘Unjustly attacked!’ Then you mean to tell me to my face that I’m a fool, and an unjust fool, do you?” Mr. Juxon had turned pale in his wrath.

“Father!” murmured Minnie, laying her hand on his arm; but he took no notice of her pleading voice.

“You’re a jackass, Mason, that’s what you are, and you are not worth my arguing with!” (He forgot, poor man! he had condescended to argue with him in print for weeks.) “After what’s passed, I shall expect you, if you want to keep your situation, to apologize—publicly apologize.”

“Apologize!” repeated Mason, aghast and indignant. “What for, pray?”

“For insulting me, and making me a laughingstock in the town.”

“For having a different opinion to yours, you mean?”

“I mean what I say. Do you think I’m

going to be held up to ridicule by my own shopman?"

Ah, there was the sting of it!—to find the redoubtable adversary he had been expending so much eloquence on was only his own assistant! He had made up his mind he had been doing battle with the Vicar, or some of his friends; and now to find it was only George Mason, whom he could have argued with and silenced any day in his own shop!

"You can't be serious in asking anything so unreasonable, Mr. Juxon; but if you do mean it, I can only say that I would rather——"

"Throw up my situation," he was about to add, when Minnie, who could bear what she was suffering no longer, said, impetuously:

"Father, let me explain. He never knew that you were 'Judex.' He has been miser-

able ever since he found it out. You are cruel to speak as you have done, and forget how well and faithfully he has served you, or you would never say such wrong and bitter things !”

Her cheeks had turned from white to crimson, and she looked so brave and beautiful that Mason had never admired her so much in his life. But he dare not show his gratitude by word or look.

“ Then *you* knew of these letters, too ?” said Mr. Juxon, turning round on his daughter. “ Pray, how came you to be in his confidence ?” And as he looked from one to the other, Mr. Moggs’s warning recurred to him.

They were neither of them ashamed to own their love, but they would have given much to defer explanations at that moment. But the task was not forced upon them. Before either of them could speak, a third

person, whose entrance a moment ago no one had noticed, stepped forward, and with a trembling voice said :

“ Oh, John, don’t be angry with them ! It’s all my fault—it is, indeed. I promised them I would tell you the week they were engaged, and they’ve never been easy about it since.”

This was poor Mrs. Juxon’s way of mending matters ! She had just entered the house from marketing, and hearing high voices in the parlour, had rushed to the fatal conclusion that the news of the engagement had come to her husband’s ears.

“ ‘ Engaged ! ’ Humph ! So you mean to tell me, Mrs. Juxon, that you knew of this—that you, her mother, have allowed—— ? ” But Mr. Juxon stopped, and sat down, with such an altered face that Minnie, all in tears, tried to steal her arm round his neck. But he roughly shook her off.

“Is this true?” he asked, turning fiercely on his daughter.

“Yes, father.”

For the first time in his life (for he was a moral man) Mr. Juxon swore a strong oath.

“Then you’re a hypocrite!” said he, hoarsely; “and you, Mason, are a bigger villain than I thought! Take off that apron; put down my tools”—he pointed to some small implements Mason held in his hand—“and fetch me in the cash-box and wages-book. I pay up your salary to the end of the week, and then you will please to walk out of my shop, and never put foot in it again!”

Mrs. Juxon interposed with tearful remonstrances.

“If he thinks he’s wronged, let him sue me in the county court; not one penny more than his week’s wages shall he have

from me," was the only reply vouchsafed to her.

Without a word, Mason went and fetched the things as bidden. He knew that great injustice was being done him, but he was not going to sue for pardon. No man had ever worked more faithfully in a master's service than he had done. So he stood with compressed lips, while Mr. Juxon counted out the money due to him, uttering not a word.

"There!" said his master, shoving the money across the table. "We know each other now, and I tell you, to your face, that with all your pretended piety and high principle, you're a humbug, if ever there was one!"

Mason turned white as death. It cost him an immense effort to subdue his indignation; but, with as steady a voice as he could assume, he said:

“When you come to think this over, you’ll know you’ve said too much, Mr. Juxon. I’m sorry to part like this, and I’m sorrier still that you should learn in this way of—of my attachment to your daughter. It has been a mistake to make any secret of it, though it was done from good motives. But I blame myself more than any one else.” And as he spoke, Mason turned quickly away and left the room.

“Oh, John! what will you do without him? It’s market-day, and nobody but the apprentice to keep shop!” sobbed Mrs. Juxon, piteously. “Let me run after him, and ask him to stay till night—pray do!”

“Stay where you are, ma’am. I’ve managed my own business before now, and I can manage it still, I hope.”

And the watchmaker doffed his walking-

coat, put on his apron, and strode resolutely into the shop.

But there was not much business done over Mr. Juxon's counter that day.



## CHAPTER VI.

## THE MEETING AT THE TOWN-HALL.

THE double discovery that Mr. Juxon had made was certainly trying for a man of his temperament. He might perhaps in time have overlooked his daughter's audacity in accepting a lover without his permission (especially as the lover would make such an eligible son-in-law as Mason), but to pardon that presumptuous young man for his conduct in the matter of the newspaper controversy was more than Mr. Juxon could bring his mind to. He had been made to look ridiculous before his fellow-townsmen, and though he was accustomed to seeing other men look ridiculous, John Juxon was

not used to, and could not tolerate, ridicule himself.

Of course the news of George Mason's dismissal and its cause soon got abroad in the town, and it quickly reached the Vicarage. Miss Crewels conveyed the intelligence there (along with a parcel of new patterns from London), and told the story to Mrs. Massingthorpe and her daughters, with such improvements as her sympathy and imagination suggested.

"I have it all from dear Mrs. Juxon herself," said the little shopkeeper, with her most confidential air; "and therefore I know it to be true, ma'am. Never did I behold such distressful faces! They do say, in the Lane, that Mr. Juxon's rage was such that his voice was heard several doors off when he turned young Mason out of the house. Whether he'll ever speak to his wife and daughter again I very much doubt.

Oh, dear, what a sad thing temper is, to be sure, when it gets the mastery of us! And what the poor young people will do—so attached as they are too, Miss Cecilia, and such a suitable match in every respect, if Mr. Juxon could but see it—is more than I can say.”

“I am really very sorry to hear of this,” said Mrs. Massingthorpe, looking quite uneasy. “And I’m sure my husband will be much troubled when he finds that young Mason has lost his situation through taking up his defence. Between ourselves, Miss Crewels, it was not a very discreet thing, perhaps, nor quite called for, to my mind; but it was meant well, I’ve no doubt.”

Mrs. Massingthorpe was not altogether pleased at the quarter from which the defence had come; but she was vexed that any ill should have happened to its author, and was quite right in supposing that her

husband would be troubled when he knew of it.

“Mr. Juxon must not try me too far,” murmured the old gentleman to himself, as he sat alone in his library that evening. “He little knows what a whip I hold over him!” and opening his writing-table drawer, the Vicar took out the volume of Paley, and turned over the pages with a thoughtful air. “The man has read it, and with intelligence,” he murmured, as he scanned the pencil-notes. “He was thirsting for knowledge at that time, it is clear;” and Mr. Massingthorpe returned the book to the drawer, and carefully locked it up again.

Meanwhile Mr. Juxon was going on his way, utterly unconscious of whips or other instruments of fate suspended over him. He had gained one thing at least. He had so far stirred up the public interest in the

matter of the new schools at Wild's End, that a public meeting was about to be held at the Town Hall, to give the inhabitants of the borough an opportunity of expressing their opinion on the management of the charity. At that meeting Mr. Juxon resolved he would speak out his mind. In the club-room at "The George" he boldly asserted that he believed Mason was, after all, only a tool in the hands of the parsons, and that they had borrowed his name to cover their own nefarious schemes ; for, of course, it would not do to let his character for sagacity and penetration suffer by an admission that he had been "taken in" to the extent generally believed.

Now, the night before the meeting at the Town Hall, George Mason sat alone in his lodgings, with a sombre face, writing a letter to Minnie Juxon, which he intended as a farewell to her. Around him were strewed

his books and clothes and other belongings, which he was about to pack up ready for his departure from the town on the morrow. The tears forced themselves into his eyes more than once as he wrote; but he had spent many hours in debating on his future course, and his mind was now made up.

“I have only the satisfaction of knowing that you won’t let the ill things that will be said about me change your heart towards me,” he was writing. “I saw in your face that day how you felt for me, and I shall never forget how bravely you stood up for me before your father. His anger against me will, perhaps, calm down in time; but I couldn’t bear more of it. I’m warm-tempered myself, I know, and I should be tempted to answer back, and say what might displease him further and separate us for ever. But don’t think, my darling, that I can ever alter——”

Thus far had Mason written when there was a knock at the door, and his landlady, with an excited air, ushered into the room, with many apologies for its untidiness, a grey-headed old gentleman with a very benign face. It was no other than Mr. Massingthorpe. The Vicar had come to thank Mason for his spirited advocacy of himself and friends, and to express his regret at the consequences he had thereby brought upon himself. Mason's face brightened under the friendly speeches addressed to him; but he looked grave when Mr. Massingthorpe talked of a reconciliation between himself and his late master.

"I don't think you quite know Mr. Juxon, sir," said he.

"I think I measure him as correctly as most people," replied the Vicar. "At all events, Mr. Mason, one good turn deserves

another ; and as I fear I have been indirectly the cause of your losing your situation, I shall not rest till I see you restored to it, or have found you another."

" You are very kind, sir," said the young man, " but—but—I have made up my mind to go to London. I have friends there who may help me to find work, and I think I've poor prospects here;" for George Mason took a very gloomy view of things just now.

" In any case," added the Vicar, after a little further talk, " I must beg you not to be precipitate, but to wait a little longer before taking the steps you speak of. Mr. Juxon may come round after a time, and all this blow over."

" I am afraid, sir, you're too hopeful," said Mason, as his visitor rose to depart ; " but I'm grateful to you—very grateful—for interesting yourself about me."

Mr. Juxon certainly did not look like



coming round the next evening, when, buttoned up in his brown surtout, with his Sunday hat pressed firmly on his head, and his walking-stick grasped vigorously in his hand, he quitted his house for the Town Hall. His wife and daughter beheld him set out with anxious misgivings. He had scarcely spoken to them for the last few days, but had comported himself like the injured man he believed himself to be.

“I wish to goodness there were no such things as meetings or newspapers!” sighed Mrs. Juxon. “We did very well without them when I was a girl, and there was only one newspaper in all the county. They may talk of their progress and education as they like, but I know we’ve more quarrels and unpleasantness in the town nowadays than ever we used to have, and I don’t see that we are any of us a bit wiser or better than we used to be.”

Happily, Mr. Juxon was not within hearing of these atrocious sentiments. He was marching down to the Town Hall, where, on his arrival, he found Mr. Burley, the Mayor, already in the chair, and the business of the meeting in progress. The chairman was explaining the unhappy diversity of opinion that existed amongst the trustees with regard to the management of the new schools, and the dissatisfaction that had been caused in the town thereby (which dissatisfaction had led to the present meeting); and Mr. Burley called upon any of the gentlemen present who had any advice to offer, or suggestions to make, to do so forthwith, that the views of the public might be known.

Whereupon several gentlemen rose and offered a variety of suggestions, backed by a wide range of argument. Mr. Ajax Smith asserted that the only sound system of

education was that condemned by "the radical clique," as he styled Mr. Juxon and his party. Mr. Barnes made sarcastic reply, intended to demolish Mr. Smith and his position, but which did not cause him to wink an eyelid. Mr. Marfleet came forward with his old airy theories about the "Teachings of Nature," the "Love of the Beautiful," and such panaceas for the ills of a fallen humanity; and Mr. Gregson took his stand on Scripture-reading and the theology of Whitfield.

Mr. Massingthorpe, who had said nothing as yet, sat listening with an air of placid attention to the various speakers. But Mr. Bruce, his curate, now rose to make some comments on certain observations that had fallen from Mr. Barnes, which he (Mr. Bruce) considered disrespectful towards the Vicar, and a challenge to all churchmen present.

It was when Mr. Bruce had sat down (with a sustaining conviction that he had given as much as he had got), that Mr. Juxon rose to address the meeting. As he did so, expectation evidently awoke, and a murmur ran through the Hall akin to the *sensation prononçée* that marks the rising of great orators in more famous assemblies. Mr. Juxon himself seemed aware that much was expected of him, and his voice had not its usual firmness when he began; but the hesitation passed, and it was soon the dogmatic voice and manner familiar to the club-room.

He began by defending Mr. Barnes's observations, and then with tolerable moderation proceeded to state his own views. Of course Mr. Juxon had a perfect right to hold those views, and to maintain them publicly by argument; but, unfortunately, he went further than that. He would not, or could

not, see that people who held contrary opinions were anything else but knaves or fools. He insinuated that there was an attempt being made by Mr. Massingthorpe and his friends to get the management of the schools into their own hands for sectarian purposes—that the intentions of the Foundress were being defeated; in short, lugged in his old grievances—clerical domination, a State Church, &c., and grew more violent with every word he uttered.

Now, of course Mr. Massingthorpe could not sit still under this. So when the speaker had done, he rose, and with mild dignity, but with considerable firmness, rebuked the angry orator :

“ It is a pity that Mr. Juxon does not give us credit for the same honesty of intention which I am quite ready to attribute to him,” said the Vicar. “ He might despair of our intelligence, but he should

not think so meanly of our integrity. I cannot own to feeling myself the intriguer he makes me out to be ;” and he went on to advise Mr. Juxon to show a little more charity in his judgments in future. “ We all need it, Mr. Juxon, in our estimates of our neighbours—I in judging you—you in judging me. The most honourable man amongst us has faults that will not bear too close a scrutiny, and there are some of us, sir, whose past lives would not bear such scrutiny at all.”

The last words were spoken with such point that everyone noticed it; and more than one person present thought the remark in very bad taste. If for a moment those words caused a pang in John Juxon’s heart—made an old wound throb again, the emotion was quickly stilled. He was not going to be put down thus with a lecture on charity !—to be preached to by Mr. Massing-

thorpe! He had come there “to expose a cabal”—“to defeat an attempt to interfere with the religious liberty of the community” (let us hope he believed his high-sounding phrases); and so, like many a doomed man before and since, he rushed on to his destruction, and would not be stayed by the hand that sought to hold him back.

Fired with his own wrongs, Mr. Juxon accused his opponents of having tampered with his assistant, Mason—of having corrupted his sense of honour, and led him on to attack him (his master) in a public print, while he was receiving his money every week, and trusted with his fullest confidence. “Is that charity, gentlemen?” he asked; “is that your Christian teaching?”

There were cries of “Order!” in the room. But the chairman seemed paralysed. Amidst the conflict of opinion going on around him, Mr. Burley had got so confused that he was

in a more dubious state of mind than usual, and so Mr. Juxon held forth without interruption for some minutes, to the scandal of some persons, and to the undisguised delight of others. At length, as the orator paused momentarily for breath, Mr. Massingthorpe, who sat opposite to him and was watching him with close attention, drew forth his watch and held it up before the eyes of the chairman — an unmistakable hint that the speaker was trespassing too far on the patience of his hearers; and, as if to confirm the same, Mr. Massingthorpe whispered:

“ Pass my watch to him, Mr. Mayor. He can’t be aware how time is getting on;” and he pushed the watch, with its old-fashioned ribbon and seals, across the table.

“ Do you see the hour, sir?” asked the Mayor, in a low tone.

“ I won’t try your patience much further,”



replied Juxon, " but if liberty of discussion is——"

He suddenly stopped, with his eyes fixed on the watch, and took it up.

" I can answer for its correctness. I have had it. Mr. Juxon, ever since I was an undergraduate at Cambridge."

As Mr. Massingthorpe uttered the words, John Juxon changed countenance, and laid down the watch as though it had stung him. Mumbling out a few disconnected words, he sat down again with his eyes still riveted on the watch, and a face out of which colour and life had suddenly fled.

Some persons thought he was ill, and the idea of paralysis passed through more than one mind; others supposed he was only engrossed in profound thought, as he sat looking down at the table. He took no further part in the discussion; but sat with a stunned air, and scarcely spoke throughout

the rest of the meeting. He was amongst the first to leave the Hall.

Refusing the arm offered him by Mr. Barnes, he passed quickly down the steps, and made his way home through the streets, with a heart on fire and limbs that trembled under him.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE RAISING OF A LONG-LAID GHOST.

WHAT was there in Mr. Massingthorpe's old-fashioned watch, that it should exercise so powerful an effect on Mr. Juxon? It was a curious handsomely-chased one, but Mr. Juxon had seen scores of curious old watches in his time. And yet the sight of this special watch had set his heart beating with a horrible fear. He was half inclined to mock himself as he walked along home, with the fresh night-air cooling his hot head, and to ridicule his own suspicions, and yet he knew he was not mistaken. He would have known that watch again anywhere, and at any distance of time. He stopped in the street to

breathe and calm himself, as a flood of miserable recollections rushed over him.

When he entered his own doors, he was so haggard that his wife started at the sight of him. He murmured something about the "heat of the Hall being too much for him," and sat down in his armchair and wiped the drops from his forehead. His presence at home at this hour was so unusual that his wife and daughter would have known that something was greatly amiss, even without the evidence of his altered face. Minnie longed to ask her father what had transpired at the meeting ; but he looked so anxious and unlike himself that she dare not utter a word.

He was recalling, as he sat there, Mr. Massingthorpe's words and looks, and he was trying to reason himself into a belief that they had no special meaning addressed to him ; but in vain ! As he sat there think-

ing, his eye wandered to the bookcase, and at once missed a familiar object. He got up hastily and began to search the shelves.

“Who’s taken the book away?” he inquired hurriedly, turning round on the affrighted women.

“What book, father?” asked Minnie.

“‘Paley’s Natural Theology.’ Where’s it gone?” He spoke in the same sharp voice.

“I used it to press some lace in,” she stammered; “and—and——”

“What do you look at me like that for?” cried her father. “What do you know about the book? Where is it, I say?”

Before the growing excitement of her father’s manner, and his agitated looks, Minnie could hardly reply.

“I let Mrs. Massingthorpe take it to the Vicarage,” she murmured; “but I didn’t know that——”

“*Let it go to the Vicarage!*” repeated her

father. "Good God! then you have ruined me!"

He looked wildly at his daughter for a moment; but the next he had subdued himself, though his face was blanched with sudden fear.

"Oh, father—father! what have I done?" cried the girl, as he stood looking at her thus.

"Nothing—nothing that can be helped now." He spoke in a slow thick voice, and returned to his seat. "I'm a fool to talk like this; but when a man's foes are those of his own household"—he stopped and looked at them both, with piercing, questioning eyes; but there was not a trace of guilt, only dismay, sheer dismay, written on their faces—and he added, slowly, "I think the heat yonder has upset me. I'm not well, and—I'd like to be left alone. Leave me."

Far on into the night Mr. Juxon sat there alone with his thoughts—alone with that long-buried ghost which had risen up once more to haunt his hearth, and drive from it all peace and security. The sad story that he sat there recalling, may be told in these words :—

Many years ago, John Juxon had served his apprenticeship to a watchmaker in Cambridge. He was a clever skilful lad, and possessing that strong love of knowledge which had distinguished him all his life. But Juxon was poor, and could ill afford to buy books, and many a time he had denied himself a dinner to purchase some volume he coveted; “for a man,” he used to say even then, “had better starve his stomach than his brains.” An old book-dealer, of whom he often made purchases, consented to supply him on credit, and Juxon undertook to pay him by instalments out of his

wages. But the young man had over-estimated his financial resources, and one day found that he owed the bookseller several pounds, and that his creditor was beginning to grumble. It happened about this time that he was sent one morning with some jewellery for inspection to the rooms of an undergraduate, who had a taste in that way. The gentleman was out, and whilst he sat awaiting his return, Juxon ventured to take up a book to beguile the time. He was so engrossed with it when its owner returned, that he was first made aware of his presence by a roar of laughter from a group of young men behind him.

“Well, this is a good ’un!” cried Frank Carrington, a young gentleman with more money than brains. “If here isn’t the watchmaker reading ‘Paley,’ by Jove! And he’s stumbled on ‘the watch lying on the heath,’ too—the old original machine that



proves all the 'contrivance and design.' Ha, ha! Isn't it stunning!"

John Juxon reddened to his hair-roots as he put down the book. He had not much love for these young aristocrats at any time (for he had political antipathies even thus early), but he felt to hate the speaker at that moment, and had hard work to keep civil.

"Do you follow the argument, sir?" asked the witty youth, with a wink at his companions.

"I think so," said Juxon, quietly.

"Ah, you are a reading man, I see. What a pity we can't pay some of you fellows to do it all for us—to get up the 'Paley' and the mathematics, and all the rest!" and Mr. Carrington went off with further witticisms at the young tradesman's expense, vowing that "paid substitutes would be a good spec. in Cambridge."

A few days later John Juxon was again

waiting in the same room, on the same errand. "And all these treasures belong to that fool, who never looks into them!" thought he within himself, as he gazed at Mr. Carrington's bookshelves. He looked enviously at the 'Paley.' "There wouldn't be much harm in taking that book home to finish. He'll never miss it." The idea, once conceived, soon found its justification in a mind like Juxon's. He resolved "to borrow the book unasked;" for the act only represented itself as such to him, and so he took the book, saying to himself: "I'll show these young gentlemen, next time I'm chaffed by them, that I've read and understand these things as well as themselves." The scholarly tastes of the young watchmaker got him known amongst Mr. Carrington's set; it became a joke with them to "draw out the learned tradesman," and argue with him on politics, or theology,

whenever they visited his master's shop. It was in these days possibly that Juxon imbibed his strong hatred of the clergy and his ultra-radical views. He felt himself, in natural gifts, the equal or superior of these idle young men, and he resolved by reading and study to make up for those advantages of education which fortune had denied him. But for this books were indispensable ; and, unhappily, the bookseller was every day becoming more importunate. He threatened to sue Juxon, and at length wrote to tell him that unless his bill was paid within twenty-four hours he should let his master know that he was contracting debts in the town which he was unable to discharge. In a rash moment the terrified apprentice resolved to take some article out of the shop and pawn it, intending to redeem it when he received his next wages. The article he selected was a watch that had been brought

to repair several weeks ago by a careless undergraduate, who had left his property there so long that Juxon thought it was forgotten, or at least that it would lie there in the shop-drawer throughout the coming vacation. But, as fate willed it, the next day the owner of the watch called for his property. Juxon was not in the shop at the time, but when he entered it, and found his master making inquiries for the missing watch, a panic seized him. He packed up his clothes and a few books, (amongst them the 'Paley,' which he was afraid to leave behind) and fled from the town that same night, to avoid the disgrace and detection he saw impending. He never reappeared there again; but three days later his master received from him a letter containing a full explanation of the matter, together with the pawnbroker's ticket, and as much money towards redeeming the watch as he had been able to raise by

the sale of his scanty wardrobe. He expressed his shame and contrition in very penitent terms, and stated that he was firmly resolved that this bitter lesson should make him an honest man for the rest of his days. And this resolution John Juxon had faithfully kept; for whatever his neighbours might think about his political or religious views, there were not two opinions in the town as to his strict integrity.

Now, it was not until this very night that Mr. Juxon had ever known that the owner of that watch was the present Vicar of Market Mudling.

The anxiety and agitation that such a discovery must necessarily produce, need not be dwelt upon.

His secret—his long-buried secret—was in the possession of the man whom he had been opposing for weeks, and whom he had publicly defied only a few hours ago.

It was a terrible moment for John Juxon when he saw in the behaviour of Mr. Massingthorpe that night an incontestable proof, not only that he knew his secret, but that he was prepared to use it against him.

This, then, was why he had kept silent so long—he was preparing to put him to open shame before all the town in the end. To his warped clerical mind (reasoned Mr. Juxon) the discovery he had made would represent itself as a means furnished by Providence for the overthrow of a foe of the Church. His heart turned sick within him, when he thought of that long-past sin of his youth rising up against him now in his old age, when he had won back the character he had forfeited. He ground his teeth when he reflected that it had come about through his daughter's folly in giving up that book to Mr. Massingthorpe, and he cursed the injustice of fate, which was bringing on him

a retribution so out of proportion to his misdeed.

The clocks and timepieces in the shop chimed away hour after hour, and the big church-bell tolled out the time sonorously to the passing night, and still Mr. Juxon sat there by his hearth, thinking. At length, as the daylight was beginning to dawn over Church Lane and strike cold rays upon the high tower that overlooked it, he crept upstairs to bed with a face so wan that his oldest friend would hardly have known him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## SUSPENSE.

FOR two successive nights Mr. Juxon had been absent from his accustomed seat in the club-room; and the explanation given—namely, that he had got overheated, and taken a chill at the Town Hall—was certainly borne out by his altered appearance. His wife and daughter were shocked at the change in him; his anxious nervous air alarmed them more than any amount of irritability would have done. His hands shook over his work; he cast uneasy, questioning glances at every one who entered the shop; and he would sit with his eyes fixed on vacancy, and his



tools idle, in a way that betrayed his pre-occupation of mind.

Of course Mr. Juxon knew quite well that it would be impossible at this distance of time to substantiate any charge of theft against him. He was in no fear of Mr. Massingthorpe getting up a criminal prosecution ; but he did fear the loss of character that would follow on the story of his delinquencies getting known in the town. That Mr. Massingthorpe intended to divulge it, he never for one moment doubted. It was clear, from his manner and words the other night, that he wished Mr. Juxon to understand that he held him in his power ; and the only question in Mr. Juxon's mind was, "How would he make the story known?" Would Mr. Massingthorpe let it ooze out gradually in friendly ears? Would he destroy his enemy's character by insinuation and ridicule (insinuation he could not

repel, ridicule he could not fling back) conveyed through the newspaper columns? Or would he boldly tell the story in public, and call on him to deny it if false? Whichever of these courses he might take, Mr. Juxon knew that his good name would be gone for ever, and that never again should he be able to hold up his head in Market Mudling.

The suspense the next few days was almost greater than Mr. Juxon could bear. He was afraid to face his fellow-townsmen for fear of betraying himself—afraid, too, lest he should read in their countenances that they knew his secret, and regarded him with the contempt due to an impostor. He sat over his work all day, and only ventured out towards evening to breathe the air, when he could pass through the streets unnoticed by the eyes of curious neighbours.

The third evening of this seclusion he

had wandered out some distance from the town, to cool the fever in his blood in the evening air. The sun had set, and the mists were rising over the fields, when he sat down to rest on a stile by the roadside. As he sat there he recalled how, forty years ago, he had traversed that same road, dusty and footsore, with his knapsack on his back, when he came to Market Mudling an unknown and friendless young man. He remembered how he had sat there on that very stile, and sworn within himself to live down his shame, and win an honest name once more.

“And had he not done so?” he asked himself, bitterly. “Ay, there was the injustice of it! Other men’s misdeeds did not rise up against them thus. Other men, who had sinned far more deeply, were never detected or made to suffer; whilst he, who had atoned for that one false step by a life

of strictest integrity, was to be brought to shame in his old age !”

No wonder the peaceful evening could not soothe him in this mood. “If his name were disgraced, as it would be, and his enemies allowed to triumph over him, as they purposed, why then the world was built on injustice ; and knaves, fools, and hypocrites had the advantage over honest men !”

Thus ran Mr. Juxon’s thoughts, as he rested on the stile ; and he was so absorbed by them that he did not notice the figure drawing near in the field behind him. The figure advanced with downcast head, striking off the tall nettle-flowers idly with his stick, and did not see Mr. Juxon until he had got close to the stile. Then George Mason (for it was he), returning from a country walk, gave a start, and seemed inclined to retreat.

But as Mr. Juxon suddenly turned round, and the light in the western sky fell on his haggard face, Mason was so shocked that he hesitated a moment, and then advanced with outstretched hand.

“It’s not gone too far, sir, for us to shake hands again, has it? I’d like to part friends, before I leave this town.”

He spoke under sudden impulse, touched by that look of misery he had surprised on Mr. Juxon’s face. But he could see the scowl that gathered there instantly.

“I want no fair professions. I like open enemies better than false friends, and you were false to me.” Mr. Juxon took no notice of his outstretched hand.

“Very well; keep up your enmity then, if you like,” said Mason, indignant that his advance should meet with no better response.

“Yes, sir, keep it up!” cried Mr. Juxon,

as he moved off the stile over which Mason sprang lightly. "Keep it up, till Mr. Massingthorpe and his godly friends have triumphed over and crushed me, for that is the game you're all engaged in."

Mason passed on without replying to the words hurled after him. He was amazed and shocked at this last outburst, which proved to him how implacable was the man's nature, and how utterly vain was that hope of reconciliation which Mr. Massingthorpe had tried to encourage. Before he had reached the town, he had resolved to waste no more time in delay, but to start for London ere the week was out.

## CHAPTER IX.

## MR. MASSINGTHORPE UNMASKED.

MR. JUXON sat there on the stile leading through the fields to Whitlingham, until the moon rose above the trees, and the clock of the village church behind him struck nine. He was consumed with anger at that thought which he had just expressed in such bitter words. "Yes, they would triumph over and crush him now. The next issue of the *Guardian* would proclaim his disgrace to the town, and his neighbours would find that he, John Juxon, the honest, the incorruptible (as it had pleased men to term him), was a sham greater than any he had ever exposed in his life."

The unhappy man groaned aloud, and rising up, paced to and fro in the grass.

“Probably at this very moment they were concocting the article that was to ruin him. A little while hence, and the whole town would ring with the news. Good God! was it not possible to avert this shame?”

He stopped, and his face in the moonlight worked with a sudden spasm.

“There was one way, perhaps, of averting it—a way, though, bitter as death. Suppose he threw himself on their mercy?—went straight to Mr. Massingthorpe, and begged for his forbearance? No! the words would strangle him ere he could get them uttered. And yet, if—if his only hope lay in an appeal to his generosity—the generosity of the man he had taunted and opposed for weeks?”

It was a terrible moment for John Juxon when he put this question to himself. His



breath came quickly; for an instant he looked round on the moonlit fields with a wild look. "Would not the bottom of that pool yonder, that glistened in the moon's rays, be preferable to such humiliation?" But the next moment he cast away the cowardly thought. There was no other chance left him but this, and he must even try it, desperate as it was. He started off at once on his way back to the town, before his resolution should be shaken.

When he got back into the streets, the moon was shining so brightly that he was afraid of being recognised. He chose the darker side of the way, and hastened on, with his hat pulled over his eyes. It was a trial to cross the Market Place, where the moonlight fell freely—a greater trial still to cross the churchyard and approach the vicarage. He stood for a moment under the church-tower, half inclined to turn back.

If any neighbour's eye should see him ! But no eyes save those of the grinning gurgoyles overhead were watching him. The church-clock struck out ten loud strokes as he stood there, hesitating and struggling with himself. Their loud metallic clang seemed to bruise and hurt his hot throbbing brain. There was no time to be lost, if he would see Mr. Massingthorpe to-night. With a desperate effort he moved on again, and knocked at the vicarage door.

"He could not see Mr. Massingthorpe to-night," said the servant. "It was too late."

"But my business is pressing, and if you tell him my name he'll see me," replied Mr. Juxon ; and in another minute he was shown into the library.

Mr. Massingthorpe was seated at his writing-table, with a shaded lamp before him, touching up an old sermon for next Sunday.

Though he showed no surprise at seeing Mr. Juxon there, he was startled by his face; it looked almost livid in the lamplight. He stood with his hat in one hand, his stick in the other—not heeding, or even hearing, Mr. Massingthorpe’s request that he would take a seat.

“I think you know what’s brought me here to-night, Mr. Massingthorpe——?” he began, in a voice which sounded strange and unnatural, even to his own ears.

“I think I have some idea, Mr. Juxon,” replied Mr. Massingthorpe, laying aside his pen, and again requesting his visitor to take a seat.

Mr. Juxon still took no heed of the request.

“Yes, sir,” he continued, in the same absorbed way. “This matter can’t rest here. I—I feel that.”

He stopped, looking hard at Mr. Mas-

singthorpe, but the latter gave him no help nor sign of understanding. It was not that he was cruelly indifferent to the man's sufferings; but as yet he was uncertain, from Mr. Juxon's demeanour, in what spirit or with what purpose he had come. Certainly he had no suppliant's mien, as he stood there with that dogged air. But, nevertheless, the heart within him was failing him fast.

“I mean, sir, what happened between you and me at the meeting at the Town Hall can't rest here,” he went on, with obvious effort. “Of course, Mr. Massingthorpe, you—you had *a meaning* in addressing me the other night as you did?”

He suddenly checked himself. Suppose he was wrong after all! Suppose Mr. Massingthorpe was ignorant of his history! That calm air almost favoured the supposition.

“Mr. Juxon, I had a meaning,” returned

the vicar, looking steadily at the speaker. "I am not sorry if it was apparent to you. I intended it to be so."

"Yes, yes, I saw that," said the wretched man, hurriedly, feeling the crisis was now come. "I am in your power, and—and I must be prepared for the consequences of the enmity I have provoked."

He had intended to say something far different—something conciliatory; but the natural man spoke out thus, under the excitement of the moment.

"You mean, I suppose, Mr. Juxon, that you must be prepared to have me disclose to your neighbours a certain secret you have tried hard to conceal from the world this many a long year?" said the vicar, slowly.

"You'll make what use of it you please, I expect," was the reply, uttered in a low dogged voice.

“That is what you infer from your previous knowledge of me?”

Mr. Juxon nodded his head.

“Well, sir, then may I ask with what object you have come here to-night?” demanded Mr. Massingthorpe, sternly.

Ah! it was a hard task to state that object. And the question was put in such a direct form that no evasive reply would avail now. Mr. Juxon’s face twitched, with an actual physical pang, as he slowly made answer:

“Mr. Massingthorpe, I’ve come here to ask you to—— to use your knowledge of that secret mercifully. I don’t know how you came to find it out, except through that book which my daughter put into your wife’s hands; but——but, as it’s clear you do know it, and as you may ruin me by making it public, I ask you——”

He stopped, and throwing all further dis-

guises to the winds, advanced to the table, and laying a trembling hand upon it, said, in a voice full of natural emotion : “ Mr. Massingthorpe, be merciful ! I’m a grey-headed man, like yourself. I’m a proud man, too, and I’ve humbled my pride to-night to come here and ask you not to use this against me. You don’t know all. I pawned that watch you wear in a moment of fear, intending to redeem it. But I’m no thief ; I never wronged a man of a penny in my life. I suffered agonies for that one act of dishonesty, and sooner than it should be known in this town, and bring me to shame, I’m ready to go down on my knees if——”

“ Hush, hush ! Mr. Juxon.” Mr. Massingthorpe rose, as though to stay the threatened action, looking almost as agitated as his visitor. “ God forbid I should seek that of

you ! Nor do I know why you should think it of me."

"Think it, sir ? A priest is but a man ; I know human nature, and to pay off an old score is——"

"Is human—at least priestly nature, is it, Mr. Juxon ? You should know me, I think, better than this. God knows, though, where the fault most lies !"

Mr. Massingthorpe as he spoke was recalling his long years of ministry in Market Mudling, and asking himself how far this ignorance was due to his own easy indolent nature, and that fear of exciting adverse criticism which had so often in his life kept him silent when it was his duty to speak out. He resumed :

"So you imagine, then, Mr. Juxon, that I discovered your secret through that old volume of 'Paley,' that belonged to one of my college contemporaries ? You are wrong, sir !



I have known your history ever since the first week I set foot in this town, and beheld your name over your shop-door."

"Known my history since——" But Mr. Juxon's voice clave to his throat.

"Yes, known both the dark and the bright side of it—the shame and the credit that attach to it. Look here, Mr. Juxon." Mr Massingthorpe had unlocked a drawer in his desk, and taken from it a letter yellow with age.) "I have had that letter by me forty years. It has always seemed to me that the writer at that time was a humble and repentant man ; but your conduct, sir, these last few weeks has made me often doubt whether you have ever known what repentance or humility mean."

At the sight of that blotted sheet he had written to his master in agony of spirit years gone by, Mr. Juxon trembled in every limb, and sank down into the chair beside him.

“I—I don’t understand,” he said, putting his hand to his head in a bewildered way. “You have known it all these years, you say?”

“Yes; and having kept your secret so long, Mr. Juxon, can you not trust me to keep it a little longer?”

For a moment, Mr. Juxon almost resented this superiority of nature. He felt crushed and humiliated by it. Kept his secret! when he could have crushed him at any time by revealing it! A sort of dogged pride made him resolve he would not show how he was moved by this discovery. But it was useless: the poor feint broke down. He tried to speak, to hold up his head; but the words would not come; his lips quivered; and hiding his face in his hands, he burst into uncontrollable tears.

“Oh, sir, you’ve got the better of me. You’ve beaten your enemy—beaten him at

last. I haven't a word to say — not a word !”

John Juxon without a word—Demosthenes mute ! If any of his club-room friends could have seen him at that moment !

Mr. Massingthorpe turned away. The spectacle of this old man's tears was very painful.

“Then this matter will be safe with you ?” asked Mr. Juxon, as soon as he was calm enough to speak. “You won't feel it your duty (and one man's ideas of duty are not another man's) to show me up in any way ?”

Mr. Juxon was rubbing away his tears as though already ashamed of them.

“Show you up, sir ?” repeated Mr. Massingthorpe, looking at the speaker with an air of sorrowful indignation. “Ah, Mr. Juxon, I don't envy that knowledge of human nature you say you possess. Your secret is

safe with me, sir—quite safe. But as you seem still distrustful, and inclined to doubt that a man can act from disinterested motives, suppose I attach a condition to my silence?”

Mr. Juxon looked keenly at the speaker.

“Suppose I agree to keep your secret on the understanding that you will take back your assistant, Mr. Mason, and not without? I know all his story, though he was not a mere catspaw in my hands, as you have insinuated. He is an excellent and an intelligent fellow, and ought not to suffer in this matter; nor shall he, if I can help it. Come, sir, is it to be a bargain between us?”

Take back George Mason! The proposition was monstrous! How could he overlook his conduct? How could he thus stultify himself before his neighbours?

“You can hardly mean what you say, sir?” he replied incredulously. “It can’t be done.”

“ Very well, Mr. Juxon, you know best about that ; but I advise you not to decide too hastily. As I don’t want, however, to force you to any unwilling decision, suppose you take a few hours to consider it over, and call upon me to-morrow evening, and let me know how you have decided.”

A look of consternation settled over Mr. Juxon’s features as he heard Mr. Massingthorpe’s ultimatum. But he was too confused, too agitated, by the turn the interview had taken to say another word. Murmuring to himself that “ it couldn’t be done,” he bade the Vicar “ Good-night,” and left the house, absorbed in reflections so agitating, as to make him indifferent whether he might be seen, or not, quitting a house which a week ago he would have made it a point of conscience not to enter.

## CHAPTER X.

“GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART, GOOD-BYE.”

GEORGE MASON was so discouraged by the way in which his advance towards a reconciliation with Mr. Juxon had been met—an advance which he felt to be even magnanimous on his own part—that he walked straight to the coach-office at “The George Hotel” on returning to the town, and booked himself for the next night’s mail for London. That done, he turned into Church Lane, and after casting a wistful glance at the old shop now shut up for the night, and standing a moment to see if Minnie’s face should appear at any of the windows, he knocked at Miss Crewels’s

door, and was admitted to the privacy of her parlour, where she sat reading the *Church of England Magazine* over her supper.

“Has it come to this, George?” asked Miss Crewels, tragically, as she heard of his resolve. “Oh, if your dear parents could have lived to see it! So carefully brought up as you were, and to be thrown amongst the temptations of that great city, where sin stalks abroad day and night, and where you don’t know even the name of your next-door neighbour, I’m told!”

“I suppose my good bringing-up will make the temptations all the less dangerous for me, or ought to do,” said Mason. “But we won’t discuss that, please;” for, much as he respected his mother’s old friend, it was vexatious that she should forget that he was no longer a lad, to be warned and advised as in the old days. “What I’ve come for to-night, Miss Crewels, is to ask of you a



friendly service, which I don't think you'll see any harm in, and which will make me leave the town a much happier man than I am at present."

Miss Crewels, like the kind-hearted creature she was, instantly announced her readiness to comply with the request, and was thrown into a delightful flutter on hearing what it was.

"I'll put on my bonnet at once," said she, "and run across. No, stay; I'll send Eliza, my little servant, for I might let the cat out of the bag."

Five minutes later Miss Crewels's servant entered the parlour where Mrs. Juxon and her daughter sat at supper, and announced "her mistress's love, and would Miss Minnie step over the way for five minutes, having something very particular to say, and thought she would like to see the new patterns just come from London?"



Wicked Miss Crewels! The pattern-box had not been opened yet. But the unsuspecting Minnie got up and accompanied the servant back. It was not until she had entered the Berlin-wool Repository and saw a hat and stick lying incongruously amongst the feminine ware on the counter, that she had any suspicion of the little plot on hand.

“Oh, Miss Crewels, you shouldn’t have done this!” she exclaimed to her injudicious friend, who had opened the shop-door with the most delicious air of mystery. “I—I can’t see him!” The poor girl had turned white as the lambswool on the counter, and seemed inclined to run away again. “I can’t—I mustn’t see him!”

“Stay, my dear; don’t be rash. You don’t know but why you might repent it your life long,” said Miss Crewels, solemnly. “It doesn’t do to drive a young man to despair, and there was despair written on

his face when he entered that room " (pointing to the parlour) "and told me how his mind was made up to do it."

"To do what, Miss Crewels?"

"To go away and seek his fortune in that wicked and worldly London, where, like many a young man before him, he may be ruined and lost, but for those precious ties of—— (Wait a minute, Mr. Mason," interpolated Miss Crewels anxiously, hearing the parlour-door creak)—"ties of home and love, my dear, that you have the power to bind around him; for truly does he love you, and well deserves a kindly word at parting."

"Going away!" repeated Minnie, in a low voice.

"Yes, my dear, to-morrow night, and booked a place already; for tried he has once more this very night to make it up with your dear father, but failed again, as was to be expected, who took him up so

sharp and bitter that further waiting is quite useless ; and now he only wants to say a fond ‘ Good-bye,’ which you never can and never will refuse to one so true ;” and the soft-hearted Miss Crewels, who was getting incoherent with emotion, wiped a tear from her eye, and blew her nose violently.

“ It will only be to say good-bye, then,” said Minnie, slowly and sadly. “ It must be broken off now, Miss Crewels. I can’t bring father any more trouble ; he has more on his mind now than he can bear, I fear.”

And Minnie bravely carried out her resolution, when she stood with her hand clasped in George Mason’s, and his eyes looking fondly into hers, what time Miss Crewels, glorying in the task of succouring love in distress, kept guard outside the parlour-door. At the end of a few minutes, Minnie came out of the parlour, pale and red-eyed,

but with a resolute expression on her little face.

“Yes, Miss Crewels, it’s all over,” she answered, in reply to the inquiring look of her friend, who wept over her as she wrapped her up in her shawl. “I have told him it must end here. I won’t give any promise to write to him, and I cannot receive his letters; but—but I shall never marry any one else; and—and I don’t think he will;” and she choked down her rising sobs, and ran home to weep out her full heart alone.

The other lover was almost in as bad straits. He was leaning dejectedly against the chimneypiece when Miss Crewels entered the parlour, and there were traces of tears on his face.

“Thank you for all your kindness, Miss Crewels,” said he to his sympathetic little friend, “but I don’t see that anything can mend matters now. It’s very hard, but one

can scarcely blame her for holding to her father as she does. She's the dearest girl ——” But he stopped, unable to sing his dearest's praises, and holding out his hand, said, “Here's good-bye to you, Miss Crewels, and to all friends in Church Lane;” and the next minute he was out of the house, leaving Miss Crewels to sit and cry over her unfinished supper, and get such consolation as she could from the reflection that “it was the fate of true love all the world over.”

When the next morning came, however, George Mason's plans were temporarily embarrassed by receiving the following note from the Vicarage:—

“MY DEAR SIR,—Will you do me the favour to call upon me this evening at eight? I hear you are resolved to leave the town, but I beg you to defer your departure until after our interview. If after it

you still desire to go, I will offer no further opposition.

“Yours faithfully,

“EDWARD MASSINGTHORPE.”

“Some further kind delusion,” reflected Mason; “but there would be time to keep the appointment at the Vicarage, and still go away by the night-mail;” so he went on again with his preparations for departure.

## CHAPTER XI.

## A CONSISTENT MAN.

THE hours that intervened between Mr. Juxon's interview with Mr. Massingthorpe at the Vicarage, and his reappearance there the following evening, were about the hardest hours he had ever known in his life. He had been thrown into such utter confusion of mind by the discovery of the generous conduct of the man he had vilified and opposed, and some of his old pet theories had been so rudely disturbed, that at first he was simply bewildered, and unable to reason or reflect. But when he came to consider things with calmness, the more he thought of Mr. Massingthorpe's forbearance

the more he was touched by it, and the smaller looked his own conduct by contrast. But that proposition! Take back George Mason! How could he thus stultify himself, as he had said? How could he pass this censure on his own conduct? Truly, no harder condition could have been devised than that on which Mr. Massingthorpe's silence was to be contingent. It turned Mr. Juxon's heart sick within him to think of the sarcasms of Mr. Barnes, the sneers of the club-room, the contempt of all his old admirers, which would necessarily follow his acceptance of that condition. Great drops of sweat broke out on his brow, as he asked himself whether he could bear these things.

At the appointed time that evening, Mr. Juxon presented himself at the Vicarage. If he had been a few minutes earlier, he would have seen George Mason enter the same



doors, and probably would have turned away again under the impression that a reconciliation scene was going to be got up, and he about to be asked to forgive and embrace the young man, after the manner of appeased parents on the stage. But Mr. Massingthorpe knew better than that. He received his visitor alone in the library, and met him with an air of welcome, as if to facilitate the hard task before him.

“I am glad you are punctual, Mr. Juxon. We shall not be disturbed here whilst we talk over the matter that engaged us last night—a matter which I can see has cost you some anxiety since.”

It was evident enough in Mr. Juxon’s face and bearing.

“Yes, sir, it *has* cost me anxiety—bitter anxiety,” said he. “I never closed my eyes last night, for thinking of it. I’ve wavered, sir—I own to you I’ve wavered—and my

will has been pulled this way and that, until my indecision nearly crazed me. But my mind is made up now, sir, and I'm come to tell you the answer I have to give you." In a few plain unstudied words, Mr. Juxon announced his consent to the proposition that had been made him.

"I expected as much of you, Mr. Juxon," said the Vicar, with a glad excited air; "and I congratulate you on coming to what no doubt was a very hard decision under the circumstances."

Mr. Massingthorpe spoke with a warmth and enthusiasm that offered a sharp contrast to the calm cold air of the other. And yet there was emotion—suppressed emotion—at this moment working in John Juxon's face.

"I—I should like to add a word or two, Mr. Massingthorpe," he said, with an effort. "You mentioned something last night about

our not having known one another all these years. I feel that, sir, to be a bitter reproach to me, for I fancied I did know you, and that you were"—he paused a moment—"a very different man, Mr. Massingthorpe, to what I have found you. However much we may disagree, sir, in our views of religion or politics, or what not—and I won't deny (as why should I?) that I stick to and hope always to stick to those opinions which you have before now often heard me express at vestry meetings and elsewhere; and I won't deny either, sir"—But John Juxon stopped. The old rhetorical manner which charmed the club-room would not serve when true and genuine emotions like those were struggling for utterance. "I mean, sir—I think you know what I mean. Will you—will you, after all that's happened, shake hands with me?"

To see John Juxon standing there with

outstretched hand and that request upon his lips!

“Gladly, Mr. Juxon” cried the Vicar, as he wrung the offered hand. “We are in a fair way to know each other at last, I hope.”

“Know each other, sir? You are the only man in this town who *knows me for what I am*, and the thought that, knowing me as you do, you can take my hand in yours as you have just done, makes me,”——His voice faltered and broke. “God bless you, Mr. Massingthorpe! I shan’t forget it—I shan’t forget it!” and he turned abruptly away to hide his strong emotion.

Now, if Mr. Massingthorpe had wished to wind up matters with a *coup de théâtre*, he would have called in George Mason from the adjoining room, and bidden them shake hands and be friends on the spot. But he preferred a more spontaneous and gradual

process of reconciliation, though, no doubt, there would have been a nice dramatic fitness in such procedure. He allowed his visitor to depart in ignorance of Mason's presence there, and not until he had shown Mr. Juxon out at the front-door, did he enter the room where the young man sat impatiently awaiting the result of his mediation.

"You may get your place at the booking-office cancelled as soon as you please, Mason," said the old gentleman. "Mr. Juxon is ready to take you back to-morrow, and I think it will be your own fault if ever he parts with you again."

"Ready to take me back? Oh, sir, how has it been done?"

But the secret of that marvellous change which Mr. Massingthorpe's influence had wrought in his old enemy was then, and ever afterwards, a secret religiously preserved.

"I can only tell you that I have Mr.

Juxon's promise to that effect; and he is not a man to depart from his word," was the Vicar's reply.

Nor did Mr. Juxon depart from his word. It had taken strong evidence to convince him of any flaws in his own system of ethics, or show him any merits in other people's; but having once discerned such, he was not the man to blink the fact. Henceforth he was constrained to admit that men sometimes practised what they preached.

But it must not be supposed that any immediate or violent transformation was produced in Mr. Juxon. He did not hasten home, embrace his wife, forgive his daughter, and announce his intention of attending church henceforth every Sunday; but a slow and radical alteration of character dated from that time.

It began with the recall of his old assistant, who of course met him in a proper

spirit, and did his best to spare his master's pride.

"George Mason," said he, "you have sued to me; I now sue to you, and tell you frankly, that if you'll take your seat again in my shop, and enter on your old engagements with me, you'll give pleasure to me and also to my family."

There was no allusion made at that moment to the other engagement, but sufficient encouragement was implied in that reference to the family to make Mason very hopeful.

But if Mr. Juxon's task was comparatively easy in putting himself right with his own household, it was another matter to put himself right with the town. It was a trying moment when he made his re-appearance in the club-room at "The George," and had to face the sarcastic visages of Messrs. Barnes and Barlow, who regarded him as a renegade, and openly



twitted him with having been "earwigged by old Massingthorpe." Mr. Juxon bore their satire with tolerable temper, and admitted (though with a painful sense of disingenuousness) that in a private interview with Mr. Massingthorpe he had been met by unexpected and powerful arguments, which had made him resolve to offer no further opposition to his wishes in the matter of the Pyphos Schools. More satire and suppressed laughter followed on this statement, with commentary shrugs and winks that made Mr. Juxon's blood boil. But he had resolved to keep silent, and to that resolution he adhered, until in an indiscreet moment that wretched little timeserver, Mr. Moggs, ventured on some witticisms upon consistency at his expense. It was the ass kicking the dead lion; and the indignity was more than human nature could endure.

"Consistency!" cried Juxon, eyeing with



withering scorn the startled satirist. “What, pray, do *you* know of consistency?—a man who tries to curry favour with all parties, and has neither the sense nor the spirit to hold opinions of his own. Let me tell you, sir, that it becomes such men as you, and as me, to speak with respect of Mr. Massingthorpe—yes, sir, *with respect*. You may stare, but I mean it, and I repeat it; and I here say publicly, gentlemen, that I hope I may never be heard again, either in this room or elsewhere, to utter a word against a man who is so much my superior in everything as I have found Mr. Massingthorpe to be!” With which brave declaration of his sentiments, Mr. Juxon rose from his seat, flushed and excited, and, laying down his pipe, wished the company “Good night,” and quitted the room.

But from that hour Mr. Juxon had lost for ever his place of authority and pre-eminence in

that assembly. His judgments were never again received with the same respect, nor issued with the same authority and confidence. In giving up his old grievances, he lost his post of leader of the opposition in that chamber, and sank to the ordinary level of humanity.

That some gain accrued to him in other quarters, however, may be inferred from the following remarks that fell from the lips of Miss Crewels, the first time she went up to "The Firs" after the return of Miss Pyphos and her niece from the Continent. The ostensible object of Miss Crewels's visit was contained in the parcel of wools, &c. she carried with her; but when the little shopkeeper had exhausted the subject of "the new blue," and the latest novelty in bead-work, she was detained by Miss Pyphos, on purpose to hear the news of the borough, and the upshot of the great "Judex"

and "Fairplay" squabble, about which there had been so much in the newspapers that had been sent to Miss Pyphos abroad.

"Well, ma'am, I think you will agree with me that Mr. Juxon has behaved very creditably," said Miss Crewels, after a most graphic version of the whole facts known to her. "And never shall I say again that we are any of us too old to alter for the better; for not only has it ended as I tell you, but last Sunday evening, when I entered church, my breath was quite taken for the moment by seeing him sitting between his wife and daughter in the centre aisle, and paying such attention to the sermon after as might put many a good churchgoer to the blush, and handing half-a-crown to the plate at collection, which really brought to my mind the widow's mite, and made me think how little one knows one's fellow-creatures' hearts after all."

Miss Crewels paused a moment for breath, and to take a sip of the sherry with which she had been invited to regale herself after her long walk. Poising her glass on her gloved hand, she resumed :—

“ And to make it clear, ma’am, to all the town that everything is made up, there stood young Mr. Mason waiting for them at the church-doors, and went off arm-in-arm with Miss Juxon, at which I could have really cried for joy, thinking how they had parted broken-hearted in my parlour, and should have made a fool of myself, I fear, but for its being a sacred place, and the organ still playing the Hallelujah Chorus. ‘ You’ll come to the wedding, neighbour?’ whispered Mr. Juxon, giving me a sly poke. At which my heart so relented for bitter thoughts in the past, that I murmured ‘ God bless you, Mr. Juxon!’ on the spot. For I say again, ma’am, that setting aside temper and

crotchets (to which we are all of us liable), there's not a man of better sense in this town, nor one who has a neater way of putting a joke when in the humour."

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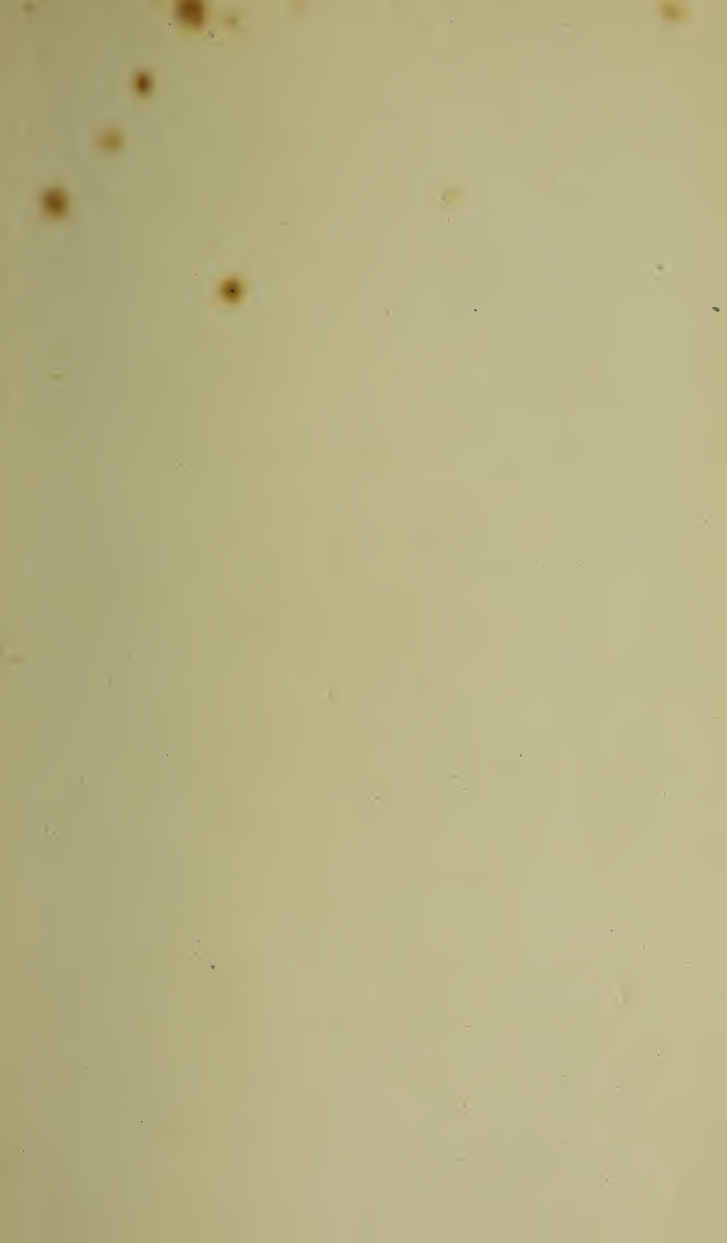
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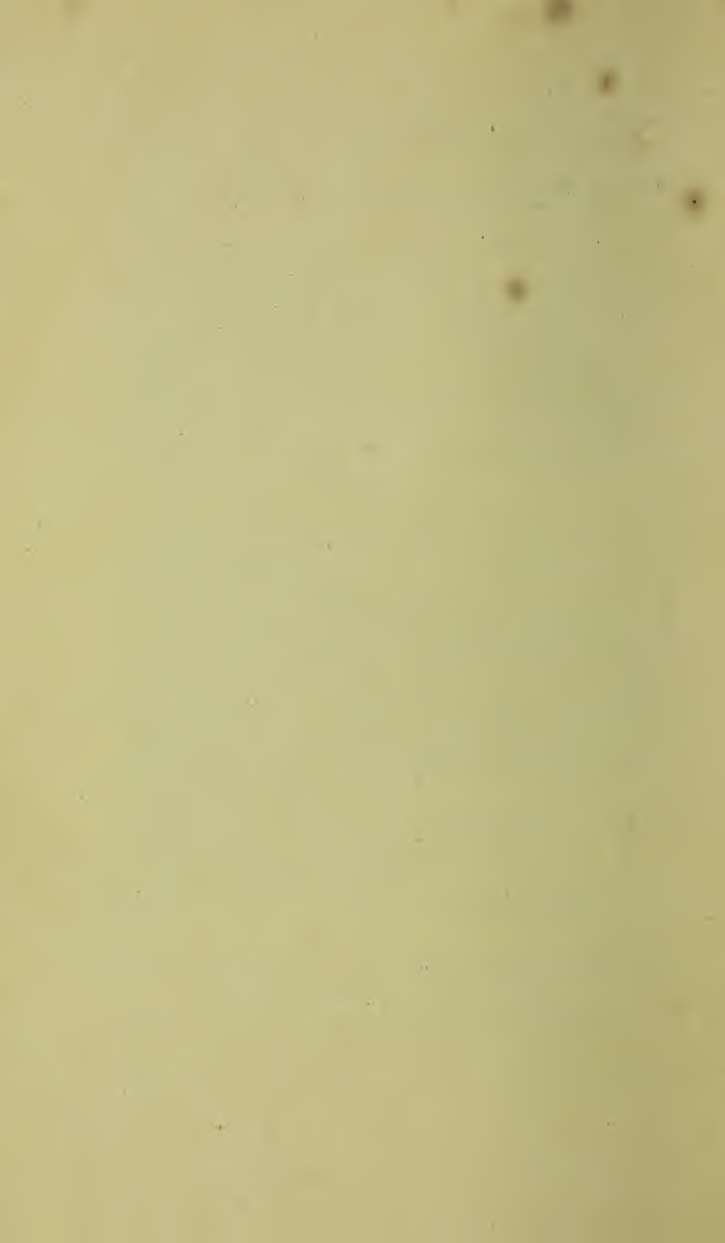
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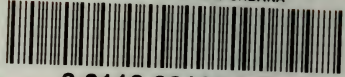








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